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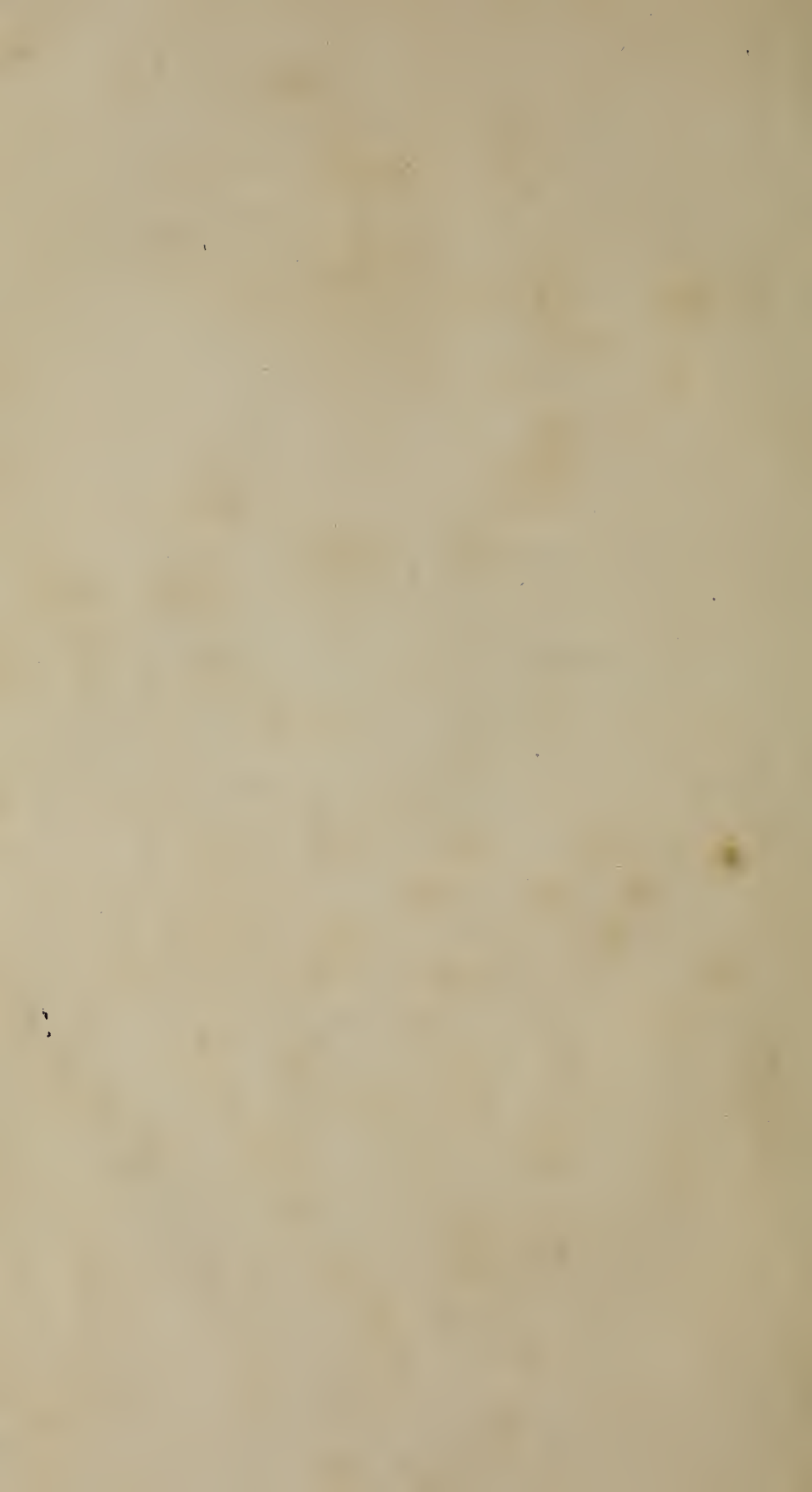
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ALLEE NEEMROO,
THE BUCHTIAREE ADVENTURER.

VOL. II.



ALLEE NEEMROO,

THE BUCHTIAREE ADVENTURER.

A TALE OF LOURISTAN.

BY JAMES BAILLIE FRASER, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF

“ THE KUZZILBASH,” “ THE PERSIAN ADVENTURER,” &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ALLEE NEEMROO,

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CHAPTER I.

A CATASTROPHE.

WITH far greater speed than he mounted, did Hoossein descend the height where his rencounter with Allee had occurred, and regaining the road followed it rapidly to the spot where his horse had been deposited. The yaboo of Caussim was hidden at no great distance; and it appeared that this attached, but somewhat untractable dependant, having lost sight of his master, was seized with an uncontrollable alarm, and could not resist the impulse which led him to return, follow, and watch over his safety. He had traced Hoossein to the first post, very nearly stumbled on the guards who occupied it, and, principally, by chance, aided by indefatigable exertion, had kept him in view till he plunged into the dark

shadow of the last height. There he was for some time at fault, till led by the voices of Allee and his master, he made his appearance, as he believed, at the critical moment, to defend that master's liberty and life. Hoossein, however, much provoked at a disobedience, which might have had fatal consequences, could not be insensible to the attachment which led his rude foster-brother to jeopardize his own life for his; and, while explaining to him the error of his conduct, acknowledged, with warmth, his sense of his devoted affection.

Once mounted, they retraced their steps as fast as the nature of the road permitted, and in less than an hour approached the banks of the Kaushghaun.

"We must turn to the upper road," said Hoossein, "the Khan will take the ford; Allah grant, we reach it in time to prevent him from crossing!"

"Then, this is the way," said Caussim, "here, behind this little hill."

In silence they rode on for about the space of half a fursuck, when a noise was heard, which might have been taken for the roaring of the stream, but that other sounds became speedily distinguishable. The shouts of men, and the neigh of horses, and the clash of arms,

arose above the voice of the waters, and Hoossein knew that the troops were passing the river.

Pressing on his already wearied horse, he soon reached a space upon the bank, which was by this time occupied by a number of men and horses. Accosting the first of these he met, he inquired where the Khan was to be found. To his dismay, he learned that the chief, fearing the delay which the crossing of so large a body, at a difficult ford, must occasion, had sent his two principal leaders with the larger portion to the upper passage, while he himself, taking the Gholaums and part of the best mounted horsemen, resolved to cross below.

In despair, Hoossein sought the principal officer, who had crossed. It was Bahram Aga.

“For God’s sake, prevent the rest from crossing, Aga! I have tidings that will alter the Khan’s views.”

“Alas! what can I do?” said Bahram Aga. “Allee Mahomed Beg is on the other side, and has positive orders to pass with all despatch.”

“Send, then, a man to tell him what I say; I must go and find the Khan.” And turning his horse, he galloped back to gain the lower passage. But time was fast flying, and the

jaded horse of Hoossein could keep no pace with the rider's good will. Before he reached the water-side, the greater number of the men had passed, save some, who, unable to stem the torrent, or encumbered with their harness, had been swept down the stream. The Khan had remained among the last on the other bank, urging, encouraging, or upbraiding those who lingered, with a perseverance worthy of a happier fortune.

Hoossein hesitated not a moment. Galloping past the wondering men he dashed into the first branch of the river ; passed it, as it were, by the impulse of his own energy ; then plunged into the larger stream, in which many were at the very time struggling to cross in the opposite direction ; and whether overcome by weariness, or jostled by others in the way, his horse wavered, and sunk almost in mid channel. He felt himself following the drowning animal, but throwing from him every thing he could part with, he, with great presence of mind, sprung forward, and breasting the waters, a few lusty strokes brought him within reach of a bush that grew low in the bank. Seizing a branch, he soon sprung upon the land. "Where is the Khan ?" he shouted, and of those few who remained upon the bank almost the first

who heard and came to the voice of the shouter was the Khan himself.

“ Alhumdulillah! Alhumdulillah!” exclaimed the young man, “I have found you, and it is not yet too late; recall the troops, for Allah’s sake! recross the river! hear what I have to tell!” but the excessive and unremitting exertion of the night had overpowered him, and before he could articulate more, he sunk insensible at his master’s feet.

Eager to gain his intelligence, as well as concerned at the condition of his favourite, the Khan made every one about him lavish attentions on the over-wrought Hoossein, who soon reopened his eyes, and after gazing around him for some moments to collect his ideas, informed his master of all he had seen, declaring that, so far from the enemy being off their guard, they appeared to be fully aware of the threatened attack, and would be found fresh, and well prepared to receive it. He ended by repeating the counsel of Allee Neemroo, to avoid an encounter, which must now take place under circumstances of great disadvantage to himself, while friendly negociation and well urged remonstrance, might gain more than the best success that could be hoped for from the sword.

The Khan, after asking many questions, and

listening to all that Hoossein had to say, replied with the sternness which he so well knew how to assume, and which brooked not reply.

“It is well, boy ; you have done your duty well. I give full credit to your report, to your zeal, and to the motives that have induced you to dwell with more emphasis than discretion upon the opinions of others ; but I must alone be the judge how to act. Take care of yourself. Ho ! some of you supply him with a horse and arms. But expose yourself no further ; you have done enough for this night. Come, despatch ! Let the rest cross with me, Bismillah !” And collecting his few remaining attendants, the Khan plunged into the stream, and reached the other side in safety, followed by Hoossein, who was mounted on one of his master’s led horses, and furnished with such arms as could be found for him on the moment.

Little time was now given for taking account of losses, or seeking for missing men. The troops were found, and proceeded onwards to a point where the two roads met, and which soon became thronged by the party that had crossed at the ford above. There was reason to believe that the loss had been still heavier among the footmen, but little was said about it ; the several bodies were, by degrees, collected together under their respective leaders

and the word was given to keep silence and move forward.

Hoossein, who was riding near his master, now spurred up to his side, and respectfully represented that, as the enemy, when he left their camp, now nearly two hours since, were then getting into motion, there was reason to expect their appearance every moment. He ventured upon this representation, he said, in case the Khan might see fit to make any disposition to receive them.

The Khan, who, at the time, was riding in moody silence, cast his eyes upon the youth as this appeal was made, and inquired a little further as to what he really had seen, and questioned him particularly regarding the time he had been on his way back. On being satisfied in these points he said, "Good, then it will do; *Inshallah!* we shall be prepared for them." No more was said, and in less than a quarter of an hour, the advance of the column reached a point where the country opened out a little, the rising grounds on the left falling back for a space and receding so as to leave a small valley or hollow, while scarce a hundred yards further on, a similar opening occurred on the right. This, it appeared, was the spot which the Khan intended to reach, for here he halted the whole force, and calling the leaders of

the different bodies together, gave his orders for disposing of the men, according to the ground.

“Mahomed Allee Beg, you will take your men into the hollows on the right ; the enemy will, no doubt, come straight down the road. I will charge the head of their column with the Gholaums ; when you hear our shout, you will advance and charge them in flank. No doubt they will be confounded and overthrown. Peer Mahomed, you will take post in this valley to the left, and charge on the other side. Bahram Aga, do you take fifty toffunchees to the top of that height yonder ; let the enemy pass on till we charge, and then pour your shot and arrows thick and fast upon them ; let not a bullet or an arrow miss its mark. The rest of the bow and arrow men will line the road, and do their best to thin their ranks, when the charge takes place in front. And now, my children, the time has come, when every man must do his best. Let us beat the Wâli, and the star of Booroojird will rise higher than ever ; you will return with bright faces, and plenty of plunder, while the Nahâwundees must cover their heads with ashes, and their blackened countenances with the veil of shame and disgrace. Eussuff Beg, and you, Hoosseïn, also, remain with me.”

Saluting their master, each leader then withdrew to execute the orders he had received ;

but a calm observer might have noted a want of alacrity, a lack of that warm spirit of confidence and resolution, which is as frequently the omen, as it is the cause of success in arms ; for those who doubt, are already half beaten. A few minutes of bustle and confusion ensued, while each corps, separating from the rest, filed off to the position assigned to it, till the Khan, with his Gholaums and attendants, alone remained.

The chief then separating this choice body into two divisions, retreated back a short space, withdrawing from the path under cover of the rising grounds on either side, and there, while two steady men went forward to reconnoitre the road and give notice of the approach of their opponents, the rest remained still and mute, but ready at a moment for the charge.

Scarcely had ten minutes elapsed after the completion of these arrangements, when distant and dubious sounds were heard in front, succeeded by the tramp of horses at speed, and in a moment more the two scouts came galloping up to the spot where they had left the Khan, who immediately rode out to meet them, sternly demanding,

“What news now? are you pursued?” for no one appeared to be following them.

“They are coming! they are coming!” said

the men nearly breathless with exertion and alarm. "The road is full of them ! and the Tuppehs are full of them ; there must be thousands ; they have attacked Mahomed Allee Beg already !" and while they yet spoke the report of musket shots, in the direction of the right hand hollow, gave testimony to the truth of these words.

" Allah-il-ullah !" exclaimed the Khan, "there is treachery here ; but we soon shall discover the traitors. Hoh ! forward, my sons, no more delay ; let us take them full in front."

But even while the words were in his mouth, and he was waving his sword and striking his horse's sides with the stirrups, a rapid fire of musketry and the shouts of men upon the left gave token, that instead of taking their enemies in flank, as was intended, the party thrown out in that quarter was outflanked itself.

It was even so. Scarcely had these parties taken up their position, when certain dull sounds, on some of the surrounding heights, gave them cause to suspect that they were not the only occupiers of the ground ; and a rustle of bushes and the tread of men had just begun to occupy the attention of the foremost, when a

sudden rush was heard in their rear, and a flight of arrows whistled thickly among them.

Confounded and perplexed, neither officers nor men knew precisely which way to turn. Shrinking mechanically from the coming storm, an irregular movement took place. As the unseen foes thundered on from the ravine behind, the Booroojirdees, already disheartened gave way before a force which they could not see and knew not how to resist, and pursued and pursuers came pouring out together upon the road just as the Khan and his Gholaums were spurring on to charge their expected opponents. For a moment, the confusion was extreme; but the voice of the Khan, with the efforts of the Meerachor and a few faithful and bold adherents, combining with the impossibility of further advance in that direction, succeeded in arresting what was fast becoming a flight, and compelling the fliers to turn and face their enemies. These latter being few in number compared with the crowd that had collected at the mouth of the ravine recoiled as it were from the mass thus stopped in its course, and the powerful reaction which took place might have restored the fortune of the day, had not the centre body of the Wâli's troops, at this moment come thundering down

the road, and charged the Booroojirdees in that quarter while in confusion. The Gholams, though burning for the fight could not extricate themselves from the shattered fragments of Mahomed Allee Beg's party, who inclosed between their own friends and this new enemy, could offer but little effectual opposition.

At length the Khan, at the expense of some injury to his own people, succeeded in breaking through their disordered ranks, followed by some of the best and bravest of his immediate attendants among whom were the Meerachor and Hoossein; and the vigour with which he charged right onward was so irresistible that he penetrated far into the hostile ranks. It was an effort of valour, which being unsupported, proved equally fruitless and unfortunate. The hostile ranks closed round him and his little group of followers, as the ocean swallows up the ship that has just been ploughing its waters. A spear had entered his horse's chest; the wounded animal reared high, and struck behind by a sword, tumbled ham-strung to the ground upon its brave rider, who was instantly stunned by the blow of a mace. The weapon was raised to repeat the blow, but the arm of him who wielded it was struck off ere

it descended, by the sword of Hoossein, who seeing the fall of his master had leaped from his horse to succour him ; and he now stood firmly bestriding the fallen chief and striking fiercely at every one who approached him.

Many an arrow glanced around or grazed his person without inflicting any serious wound, but he could not long have resisted the storm of assailants, had not temporary succour reached him in the person of Eussuff Beg and his own foster-brother Caussim, who with three or four of the Gholaulms that had followed the Khan now burst through the ring formed round their fallen master.

“Hah ! hah ! Lac’awund ! hah ! hah ! Boo-roojirdee !” shouted Eussuff, as in spite of the darkness he distinguished Hoossein stemming the rush of foes.

“Where is the Khan ?” added he as he sprung to his side.

“Here, under me, beneath his horse, hurt ; for God’s sake, try to raise him while I keep off these devils,” replied Hoossein in an under-voice.

“Penah-bur-khodah !” ejaculated the Meerachor springing also from his horse to the ground, and endeavouring with the help of a Gholaulm, to extricate their master, though blows were raining upon them.

“Yah Allee ! Booroojirdees,” shouted Hoossein ; “hither men, hither !”

“Silence, ghorumsang,” responded a huge Buchtiaree horseman, aiming a furious cut with a sword at the young man’s head ; but encountering the heavy club of Caussim, the steel snapped in two, “Yah ullah !” thundered Caussim in return, as a second sweep of the same trusty weapon hurled the assailant from his horse.

During this furious mêlée, the armed circle of horse and foot swayed to and fro alternately as the fall of one or other of the combatants produced a momentary effect. Had there been light, the business would have soon been terminated ; but in the darkness and confusion no man could easily distinguish friend from foe. In spite therefore of blows and danger, the Khan was dragged from beneath his dying horse, but not until he had received such further injuries as completed what his previous wounds had already well nigh effected.

The first word he uttered was the name of Hoossein, and Hoossein alive only to his master’s state, was instantly at his side.

“Hoossein, my son ! art thou there ?” he feebly articulated, but the tide of life had already ebbed too far, his efforts at further speech were in vain. A faint “Allah ! Allah !”

fluttered on his lips, and on this disastrous field, surrounded by fierce and conquering foes, did the lap of Hoossein pillow the lifeless head of the chief whom he had loved, and served with so much devoted attachment.

In vain now, did the Meerachor and Causim, almost the only survivors of the little knot, seek to defend themselves and the body of their dead master from the trampling of the horses and the blows of their exasperated riders. A few seconds more must have seen them stretched beside him; but just then a shout was heard in the rear, followed by the cry of "The Sirdar! the Isheck Aghassee! *Ser Hissab! Ser Hissab!* make way for the Sirdar!" and preceded by two men bearing torches, and attended by many brilliantly appointed horsemen, a tall and commanding person rode up to the spot, while the combatants fell back on either side.

"Hoh! whom have we here?" said he, casting a glance upon the group on the ground. "What? Eussuff Beg? and hurt?—Hold back, hold back, men. Come, come, desist old comrade, the game is over, no use in fighting more; no harm shall befall you, man; you are my prisoner for the present. On my head be your safety;—but, who may this be?"

“Ai, Mahomed Beg!” replied the Meerachor, still panting with toil, “thanks be to Allah you are here! I am your prisoner. I am your *Dakheel*!—the game is indeed over, for alas! alas! there lies Kereem Khan!”

“Penah-bur-kodah! is it so? Ai wâhi! Ai wâhi! Alas! alas! Wullah Billah! I am distressed, and so will be the Wâli. He never dreamt of such a misfortune! He sought to check his extravagance, but never contemplated his ruin or his death. I have orders to do all that may be possible to conciliate, to bring about an understanding between him and Isfundiar Khan! Alas it is in vain!—But the business is over, your men have fled on all sides, ours keep the ground alone; there is no pursuit and little damage; only here has there been real resistance. Bnt who is this youth? Was he about the Khan?”

“The curse of Omar on him!” exclaimed a man whose right arm was wrapped in a handkerchief, but who, with a dagger in his left, rushed furiously upon Hoosseïn who still remained on the ground supporting his dead master; “This is he who struck off my right hand; he is mine, and I will have his life in return.”

“Hold, hold ghorumsang! Touch him not, he is *my* property!” shouted another voice,

and quicker than the word, the hand of Allee Neemroo struck up the dagger and disarmed the man who held it, and who still loudly clamoured for revenge as the price of his blood. "Out, villain," said Allee, "are you a beast to murder an unresisting prisoner? Aga," continued he, addressing the Sirdar, "I would represent that this is the very youth of whom I told you, who refused to leave his master in danger, and to save himself. Behold how he has kept his word! Even death itself has not had power to separate them. You, Aga, who know how to value fidelity and zeal, say, is he not worth preserving?"

"By the head of the Wâli, he is worth more than gold," replied the Sirdar; "and he shall not need to seek far for another master if he wants one. Begone, miscreant!" continued he to the wounded man, "would you carry the law of bloodshed into the field of battle? Is a man not to defend his own or his master's life in fair and open fight? Begone! Stout soldier as you are, the youth you would destroy is worth your whole tribe. He is *mine* and let me see who dares to cast a frown upon him! Young man, rise up, fear neither for yourself or him who lies there. Rest assured that his remains shall meet with all due honor and be

placed at the disposal of his family : for you, it shall be my care to provide as best shall suit your views."

The issue of the skirmish was much as the Sirdar had described it. Prejudiced from the first against the expedition, which both men and leaders regarded as rash and imprudent ; disheartened by omens and appearances, and disgusted by the more than ordinary obstinacy of their chief, the troops came to the ground, quite deficient in that spirit and alacrity so necessary to success, even under more favouring circumstances. The difficulties and losses of the night march had aggravated their depression to an extent that rendered the surprise they so unexpectedly met with, irremediably and rapidly fatal. The only corps that made any stand was that of the Gholaums, who were consequently the principal sufferers. The rest dispersed and fled as they best could, so that the field was soon left to their enemies, who encamped upon the ground without an attempt at pursuit. The loss in numbers, though considerable, was less fatal to the family and tribes of Booroojird, than the moral effects of the defeat ; and in fact, they never did recover the importance they had attained under the government and conduct of the unfortunate Kereem Khan.

On Hoossein, the shock fell with peculiar severity. His attachment to the Khan had been strong and sincere—stronger indeed, than he was himself aware of, or perhaps could have readily accounted for, considering the comparatively short period of his service. The fate of that chief had severed at a blow his connection with Booroojird, that spot endeared to him by so many interesting recollections—the scene of his entry into active life—where his young heart first swelled with the pride of mingling among men, and sharing in manly exploits—where he had gained, and felt that he deserved to gain the confidence of him who was now gone; but whose favour seemed the more precious from his loss. To him, that loss was the wreck of all his hopes—for what young, sensitive, mind can regard with calmness the disappointment of its first ardent aspirations. To him then, Booroojird was now nothing. With the family of his late master he had never maintained much intercourse; it seemed as if some jealousy had operated to render them cold to his advances. Many of his comrades had fallen in the late unfortunate expedition. His friend, the Meerachor, talked of retiring to his own village. Should he then go back to Booroojird to find himself a stranger—perhaps an intruder, without either occu-

pation or welcome? He would not; he was resolved to return there no more. But what then was to become of him? While yet stunned, as it were, by the weight of the blow which had altered all his prospects, he felt himself unable to decide; so, for a time, he thankfully accepted the protection and favour of the Sirdar, Mahomed Beg.

Soon, however, there arose in his heart, now softened by misfortune, and no longer rendered selfish by ambition, an eager longing after home, which nursed by many a tender recollection and thrilling hope, grew at length so powerful that he could not resist its impulse. It was in these hours of gloom and sadness, when his weary soul yearned for some resting place, that the image of the fair young creature, whom he had so tenderly loved, and who so fondly returned his attachment, would rise to his remembrance, and fill his head with pangs of mingled affection and remorse; for how ungenerously had he neglected her!—Bitterly, in this chastened mood, did he reproach himself for this unfeeling neglect, and deeply did he vow, and confidently believe, that were he but restored to his own quiet home and to the smiles and caresses of his beloved Ausieh, neither the whisperings of hope, nor the temptations of the brightest or most adventurous

career should induce him again to exchange the tranquil happiness of an obscure village life, for the checquered and uncertain, though heart stirring joys, which the camp or the court can bestow.

Inspired with such feelings, what was there at Khorrumabad to detain Hoossein from the haven which he sighed for? Tendering his most grateful acknowledgments to his protector for the kindness and favour he had received, he solicited permission to visit his family, and the assent which was granted to his request was accompanied by a kind assurance from the Sirdar, that he might rely on his favour and protection, whenever he might worthily claim it. Allee Neemroo, who had so well repaid his debt to Hoossein, had already quitted Khorrumabad; none other was left to call forth his regrets at parting, so that the young man, with a lightened heart and eager spirit, turned his face once more to the eastward, and took the road towards Ameenabâd.

CHAPTER II.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

It was on a lovely summer evening, that Hoosseïn, wearied in body from a long day's journey, but strong of heart and ardent in youthful hope, made his way up the beautiful glen which led to his native village. The setting sun cast a deep red gleam upon the mountain tops, and lent a richer hue to the full bright verdure of the foliage, from amongst which the warm grey of the clay-built dwellings peeped forth in cheerful contrast, while the numerous columns of thin blue smoke, that rose far into the calm air, told of happy fire-sides and peaceful domestic pleasures. There was an air of quiet and security in every thing that met the eye, which contrasted powerfully with the scenes of strong and painful excitement, in which the young wanderer had so lately been an actor. The cattle were slowly returning from their pastures, and their deep

prolonged lowings mingled with the bleat of the numerous flocks, and the cheerful voices of the villagers, in a harmony that went to the very soul of Hoossein, and his step became lighter and more rapid with the increased excitement of his mind.

At length, he reached the point where the two streams met, and the village arose in terraces above, divided as has been described into its two distinct parts. Of two pathways that here met, one led to the right, ascending to the *Meheleh* or division which was governed by the Kerbelai, while the other wound up the point to the principal division that contained the house of the Hadjee. Here Hoossein, for a moment, hesitated. Duty and propriety, parental respect, and affection, pointed to the former path; but love, fervent and anxious love sharpened by all the growing fears that muster in dark array to scare the lover's fancy as the hour of meeting draws nigh, pressed him to take the other, and terminate his suspense at once.

Ah, who that has ever had the chance to revisit his home, after long absence in a distant land—an absence embittered by ignorance of all that may have happened there, is stranger to the torturing anxiety, the fearful misgivings

of that hour, to which for days, and months, and years, perhaps, he may have looked forward with burning impatience? What is there that he does not dread? What may there not have chanced to rend his heart. That circle of beloved faces he left around his hearth, shall he find it yet unbroken? Alas, who can hope so great a blessing in this world of death and woe! And as the moment for dispelling all his doubts arrives, has he not half recoiled from tearing off that veil which he so often would have given worlds to lift, but for a moment!

Hoossein did hesitate; a thrill of doubt and fear did indeed shoot through his heart as he glanced at each well remembered object. But his hesitation was short. He took the left hand road; to have done otherwise would have been to him impossible. In fact, with ready casuistry, he easily persuaded himself that such was the best and rightest course; that he should hear as soon and surely of the welfare of his own household, by going to the other Meheleh and to the Hadjee's house as by proceeding directly to his own; for ten to one, thought he, the Kerbelai will himself be there, and thus he should satisfy every wish at once. Mounting, therefore, the steep pathway

with a step half bounding with impatient eagerness, half faltering with increasing apprehension, the young man came in sight of the bridge which, crossing the ravine, formed a junction between the two Mehelehs. Many a group and single figure did he observe, dotting the little pathways that led to various points of the village; but his eye wandered over them with impatient restlessness, until at length, it fixed upon one among them all with ready and instinctive keenness. It was that of a female, who bearing in her hand a vessel, with slow and somewhat feeble steps approached the bridge. The heart of Hoosseïn beat high with agitation. Could that be she on whom all his thoughts were fixed—could it be Ausieh? Where then was the light and active step, the graceful air with which she was wont to bound like a young fawn? Could that indeed be *his* Ausieh? A moment more would serve to tell. He sprung up the remaining space, and was, indeed, convinced and heart-struck. But the female saw him not; unheeding, as if absorbed in thought she passed on, nor till the hand of Hoosseïn was almost on her shoulder, and his voice was in her ear, exclaiming, “Ausieh! my own dear Ausieh!” did she even observe that any one was near her. She

started at the sound; gazed for a moment, with out-stretched arms, and a bewildered air, then shrieking out his name fell forward, senseless on his bosom.

What then were Hoossein's feelings, his horror, as he saw her pale, and stiff, and motionless in his arms! "Great God! I have killed her!—wretch that I am! what now remains, but to die! Ausieh! Ausieh! wilt thou not hear me, dearest? it is Hoossein who calls thee, and beseeches thee to pardon him!" But vain were all his wild outpourings of tenderness and frantic grief; and melancholy, indeed, might the consequences of this sudden shock have been to Ausieh, had not some women of the village alarmed by her shriek, and his wild exclamations, come running down to the spot.

Finding Ausieh insensible in the arms of a man, they added their screams of terror to the confusion of the scene; but soon instinctively recognizing him in spite of his altered appearance, their screams were changed into mingled exclamations of joy, surprise, and reproach; and then only did they address themselves to the recovery of the fainting maiden. Their endeavours succeeded, and Ausieh opening her eyes gazed wildly around her, until they

lighted on the person of Hoosseïn, who stood in breathless terror, leaning over her. Her lips then moved for some moments, and at length she faintly said, "Great God! it is he, in truth! It is no dream—no vision."

"It is, it is, dearest Ausieh; it is your own Hoosseïn, returned to seek your pardon, and never to quit you more! But, oh Allah, what has happened to you, Ausieh, that I see you thus?" for Hoosseïn now saw more clearly that her dark and speaking eye had become lustreless and hollow, while the rounded beauty of her graceful form had given way to an alarming emaciation. "For the sake of Allah, speak, dear Ausieh!" he repeated, and sought to clasp her again to his heart; "speak, and tell what has befallen you—you have been ill surely?"

But female pride and maidenly reserve revived with reviving nature. Coldly repulsing his caresses, while a faint gleam of indignant scorn lighted up her pale countenance, she replied,

"Whatever may have happened to me or any one here can be of small consequence to one who has given himself so little concern about us of late. There are others, no doubt,

who have greater claims on his regard ; let him keep his inquiries for them."

There was a touch of Ausieh's former pouting ways, in the curl of her beautiful lip, as she uttered this taunt, which gave infinite comfort to Hoossein ; for, though it taught him to expect her displeasure, it convinced him, that however weak the body might have become, the spirit was still strong, and neither love nor pride extinct within her breast.

" Oh, dearest Ausieh," said he ; " if you knew what I have suffered ! If you but knew all that has happened !"

" What need of that ?" said the maiden, in a calm and scornful tone, though her lip still trembled as she spoke. " We see that you are here, safe and sound, *Mashallah* ! it is well—praise be to God !—it is enough. Your father, the Kerbelai, will rejoice, and the good woman, your mother, will no doubt be delighted. She has been ill, indeed, like others, but your arrival will, of course, restore her. I was just on my way to inquire how she was ; but now there is no need. I was taking her some sweatmeats. *La-illah-il-ullah* ! they are spilt and the pots are broken ! Well, she will have you instead—so so, God protect you ! Perhaps you will come to see the Hadjee in the morn-

ing? He still lives, the old man, and often talks of you, little as you care for him."

"Ausieh! Ausieh! do you mean to drive me mad? What does this coldness and trifling mean? Is it to punish me for my folly and neglect? Alas! I have already been full sorely punished, and bitterly do I rue the cause I have given to you and others here to blame me for thoughtlessness; but if you have worse thoughts of me—if you imagine I ever forgot you, or gave to any other the place which you alone hold in my heart, you do me deep injustice. Why, then, should you treat me thus, and make the hour of my return an hour of bitterness, instead of joy?"

"*La-illah-il-ullah!*" responded the maiden, with a wayward flippancy which ladies sometimes adopt to tease a truant lover on his return to their chains, as anglers play with a fish securely hooked, "*La-illah-il-ullah!* who is it that accuses you?—Surely not I? What right could I have to do so? God knows I bid you welcome, very welcome; your place has long been empty; we rejoice to see you fill it again. What more can I say?"

"Ausieh, you kill me. I have been very faulty, who is there that has never sinned? But I cannot bear this scorn. I return after

suffering much, to seek rest in my own home, and kindness and welcome from my own people—above all, pity and forgiveness, and affection from my own promised Ausieh—for what were all without these ? If they be withheld—if she reject me, this is no place for me. Think, then, dearest Ausieh ; be not too hasty or severe ; think before you decide, for with you it now rests to determine whether my home henceforth shall be Ameenabâd or the wide world, to which a harsh word from you may drive me !”

A tear quivered afresh in the eye of Ausieh at this appeal. She trembled much, and the strength of her agitation was almost overpowering ; but either the spirit of perverseness was still too strong within her, or some new feeling had come to aid her pride, for recovering herself, with an effort, she resumed, with studied calmness :

“Nay, Hoossein, God forbid that anything I say or do should drive you hence ; it pains me to hear that you have suffered, and Allah knows you have my best wishes. No doubt you will now be happy ; your worthy mother is sure you will be so, particularly when the fair rose of Booroojird shall have been transplanted to the garden of Ameenabâd. Ah !

we shall be honoured in her acquaintance. But good night, it is late, and I must return home."

"Ausieh! what mean you? What tale, what lie have you been cheated with? Speak! by your own soul;—for the sake of Allah!"

"What lie! hah! hah! what lie? No, no; no lie! Nothing—nothing! Farewell! Tomorrow, perhaps, you will see the old man."

"Ausieh! you mock me!" cried he, passionately. "By your own life I know not what you mean; but if you impute to me any unfaithfulness towards you, I swear that you are deceived. What is it that you mean? What rose of Booroojird is this? By the martyred head of Allee—by the holy Caaba itself, I know of none—none, for me at least, nor any other than yourself, Ausieh!"

But Ausieh, either unconvinced, or resolved on the dangerous experiment of trying her lover still farther, would not yet drop the taunting tone which she found had touched him so keenly.

"Allah!" cried she, "what need is there of oaths, what business is it of ours? We neither ask nor care about the matter! And so you have been disappointed in that affair, too? Well it is a pity; but fear not, you will get

over it. Ah ! people do get wonderfully over such things !” added she, with a deep sigh, and she continued muttering in a lower tone, “ I your rose, indeed—*La-illah-il-ullah !* a withered, blighted bud ! We deserve, indeed, to be laughed at, and you do well, Mashallah ! Good night ; good night !”

Heart-struck by her ill-timed levity and coldness, for a moment or two, the young man replied not.

“ And is it then so !” he said, although with bitter feeling. “ It is well ! You have said enough, and I am gone. Henceforth I trouble or offend you no more. I had erred—erred towards you, Ausieh, and willingly confessed it. I deserved your anger and was prepared to bear it ; but this cold contempt — this groundless and easy suspicion of my truth, I cannot and I will not endure. I came hither, Ausieh, expecting happiness—I have found misery. I returned, after much distress, to seek for a resting place ; a home !—but I have found neither ; without you, Ausieh, Ameenabâd is no home for me. May Allah grant to you a better lover, and a happier fate than you have doomed to me. Oh, God ! could I have foreseen such a meeting as this, would I ever so earnestly have sought it ? But may God protect you, Ausieh—this parting is our last !”

“Ah, little skilled in woman’s heart and ways ! Was Hoossein’s eye so dull that he could not detect the agitation of his mistress’s soul in her trembling tones ? Or did the waning light deceive him, or the gathering tear so dim his eye, that he marked not the uncertain step with which she turned to take her homeward path up the steep bank ? Or had he rather, in spite of these marks of latent feeling indignantly resolved to fly from her who had scorned alike his love and his repentance ? If such were his resolve, alas ! for the infirmity of a lover’s purpose ! One backward glance as he turned to leave her served to shew him Ausieh tottering in her path ; another moment saw him at her side. He reached her just to save her a second time from falling ; but not again did she either faint or repel his attentions. Trembling like an aspen, she rested unreluctantly in his arms, and the tears poured fast from her half closed lids, as she whispered in scarcely audible tones,

“Ah, Hoossein, I have been very ill—and all for you, Hoossein ; all from your conduct, cruel !”

“Merciful Allah !” replied he, holding her to his heart, and soothing her with the tenderest caresses. “It is true, I am a wretch. But oh

Ausieh, never, never was I false to you—never, never ceased to love and think of you.”

“Ah ! so you say, and I, weak wretch, cannot find it in my heart to disbelieve you. I know I ought to upbraid you ; I have tried to do so. I have tried hard to despise and forget you, but I could not, Hoosseïn ; the effort had well nigh killed me. And then we thought you dead ! Allah ! Allah ! I also have been very wretched. But it is past. And you swear to me that you love me still ? that you never have been false ? Oh, thank heaven ! I believe you ; for, indeed, I cannot help it.”

The women who had assisted Ausieh discovering that there was a quarrel between the lovers, when they saw her sufficiently restored, had discreetly left them to themselves and returned to spread the news of Hoosseïn’s arrival through the village. Thus, when some of his friends and family, who hearing the tidings had run to meet him, found him assisting the still trembling girl towards her own house, for her weakness appeared in no degree to lessen as they advanced, they saw only cause for congratulation, and he was escorted, with many loud tokens of joy, to the old Hadjee, who received him with the delight of a parent welcoming a long absent child.

With his mother an interview of a different kind awaited him. Hearing the tidings of his arrival, which sped with great rapidity through the village, the old Kerbelai came hurrying over to the Hadjee's house, where he found his son still engrossed with young and old, although the Hadjee had more than once considerably admonished him to leave them and repair to his sick mother's bedside. The Kerbelai's arrival was an appeal which Hoossein could no longer resist; so taking a tender leave of Ausieh, who was now as fond and gentle as she had at first shown herself scornful and indifferent, and whom he entreated very earnestly to take care of herself, for his sake, he quitted the Hadjee's house, and crossed, with the Kerbelai, to the other Meheleh.

From him, on the way, he learned something of what had occurred during his absence. It appeared that his mother, who had at first held forth in the most exalted terms of her son's prospects of advancement, had subsequently become uneasy from the cessation of all intelligence respecting him, and the prevalence of unfavourable rumours about the Khan's affairs. The disturbed state of the country, not less than the inclemency of the winter season, had rendered it impossible to

ascertain the truth; and long before the time of the Khan's fatal expedition, she had fretted herself into a state of actual illness. Bad news, however, contrive always to travel at speed, and obscure reports soon reached Ameenabâd, of that chief's discomfiture, with the loss of many of his followers—some added that of his own life; and there were not wanted good natured friends who insisted that Hoossein had perished with him. These rumours fell like a deathblow upon more than his mother. She, poor woman, threw herself into violent ecstasies of grief, during which she continued constantly calling on the name of her son and of the Khan, insomuch that the bystanders were at a loss to guess for whom she most lamented. The tempest of her grief, it appeared, had by this times subsided; but had left her so worn out that she seldom quitted her room and appeared to be hastening to the grave.

On poor Ausieh, the intelligence had lighted with even yet more stunning force. Though sadly downcast after the departure of Hoossein, she had maintained a degree of tranquillity which, though far from resembling her ordinary lively spirits, prevented her from becoming a subject of much remark to those who saw her not in secret. The occasional tidings

too, that reached her of his welfare, and the favour he enjoyed in the service of his master, were cordials, which, from time to time, revived her hopes and raised her spirits. But these she was seldom permitted to enjoy in peace and comfort. Ausieh, as we have seen, was no favourite with the mother of Hoossein, who, whatever might be her opinion of the maiden herself, had always regarded with displeasure her son's attachment to her, and openly spoke, as if she considered her as greatly his inferior—a match totally unsuitable for him.

Still, however, she did not object to maintain an intimacy with Ausieh; who, on her part, though not insensible to the ungracious conduct of her lover's mother, yielded rather to the influence of that tie which seemed to unite them in the same object of affectionate regard, than to any feeling of indignant pride, and willingly met her advances. During the visits that frequently passed between them, the great theme of her discourse was Hoossein and his prospects, which, she would adroitly remark, might probably prevent his return to Ameena-bâd, and lead him to settle permanently at Booroojird. She even insinuated the likelihood of his being fixed there by other ties, as

the favour of his master was, she averred, so unbounded, that he would spare no means of adding to the comfort of so highly valued an adherent.

At first these insinuations, though always jarring to her feelings produced no other effect on Ausieh than that of disturbing the comfort of this intercourse. She regarded her but as a vain and silly woman, whose selfish pride was matter of contempt and pity, rather than of anger. Had she not Hoossein's plighted oath, and could *he* deceive her? Then, was not this woman *his* mother? and must she not learn to bear with, if she could not love her as she could wish? In process of time, however, whether by dwelling in thought continually upon her favourite object, the Kerbelai's wife had brought herself to believe in what at first she only hoped and desired; or whether she acted systematically, with intent to break off a connexion which she so greatly deprecated, she gradually began to speak in more distinct and positive terms of his expected marriage at Booroojird, and to descant upon the charms of his future wife, until poor Ausieh, bewildered by the continued silence of Hoossein, became first alarmed, and in the end convinced that his mother must have good grounds for what she

so continually asserted. Still, however, did she cling to hope, and identifying, as it were, the mother with the son, continued her attentions to the former, during her growing indisposition ; notwithstanding the pain which she experienced from the nature of their intercourse.

At length the old woman declared, in distinct terms, that all the arrangements for her son's marriage and final settlement at Booroojird, were complete, and only awaited the pleasure of the Khan, who intended, she said, to bestow upon him certain distinguished marks of favour. How this information had reached her, she did not declare ; but Ausieh felt that *she* had received no tidings to comfort her, either by a confirmation of his love and truth to her, or in contradiction to the odious reports that had so much distressed her. For the first time she felt utterly miserable and desolate ; and though she might succeed in maintaining an appearance of composure in the presence of her tormentor, no sooner did she retire from her view, than the full weight of her grief came upon her, and she sunk under its burthen.

From this time the hopes and the health of Ausieh gave way. She pined in secret, and when her pale cheek and fading form called forth the anxious inquiries of those of her fa-

mily who observed it, she would force a melancholy smile, and declare that nothing ailed her. The Hadjee, of whose life she was the delight, became miserable at seeing the lovely flower, which he had cherished from its earliest birth, withering hopelessly even in the bud. It was a cloud that cast its shade not only over the house, but on the whole village, for there were few who had not felt the spell of Ausieh's loveliness, and still fewer who did not, in some degree, sympathize in the grief of their good old chief.

At length came news of the Khan's discomfiture. Nor did the report of Hoosseïn's death tarry long behind. It was indeed but a report, and might be false; but how prone is the wounded heart to believe the worst! Prostrate as were the hopes of Ausieh, and miserable as she had been made by the supposed desertion of her lover, what was all she had yet suffered to this terrible blow? It was in truth the consummation of her fate.

Faithless though he might be, she now felt, too surely, that even in her hopelessness there had been hope;—to know but that he lived, was something. But now he was gone! He on whom her soul doated, as the vital spark of its existence, was no more. He had quitted

this world for ever, and what now was the world to her? Severe, indeed, was the illness which followed this shock; but there is in youth an elasticity which makes wonderful efforts to recover lost ground, however dreadful the calamity under which the sufferer may have fallen; and Ausieh, weak and trembling indeed, but still slowly recovering, arose from her bed of sickness. Her first visit, when able to leave the house, was to the mother of Hoossein.

“She is *his* mother,” said she to herself; “alas! what must she feel. Though she loved me but little, I will go to her. Comfort her alas! I cannot. Ah! can any thing ever comfort me?”

She went accordingly, and the loud and frantic grief of the unfortunate woman was so heart-rending, that Ausieh almost dreaded to venture there again. It seemed, however, as if her feelings towards the maiden had undergone a change; and that Ausieh, no longer an obstacle to her ambitious views, had not only ceased to be obnoxious, but had actually acquired a value in her eyes as something connected with her lost son, and to whom she could speak of him, unceasingly, without fear of interruption. The tone, indeed, which she

adopted, in these conversations, was not at all times agreeable to Ausieh ; but she pitied a distress which found so powerful a sympathy in her own breast, whatsoever the mode of its expression, and all her better feelings induced her to consent to some personal sacrifice, in order to comfort, so far as she could, the bereaved mother.

In this way stood matters at the village, when Hoosseïn arrived ; and the effect of his sudden appearance on Ausieh has been seen, as well as how soon, when convinced of his personal safety, pride and indignation had come to her aid and enabled her, for a time at least, to hide the love and fondness which was striving for utterance in her heart. The tidings that her son was not only alive but in the village had reached the ears of the Kerbelai's wife, so long ere he made his appearance, that the joy inspired, and the maternal tenderness awakened by the news, had begun to give place to a jealous impatience for some time ere he approached ; and she had, more than once, inquired, with increasing peevishness, what could possibly be detaining him, before he actually did present himself.

In truth, along with the assurance of his safety, there had rapidly revived, in her breast,

those feelings and prejudices which the belief of his death had lulled to rest. She immediately conjectured, that instead of proceeding at once to his own home and family, he had gone over to the Hadjee's to see Ausieh; and that all she had done to prevent this ungrateful union would now be rendered vain. No wonder, then, that when her son did make his appearance, although she embraced him and wept upon his neck, her tears and blessings soon turned to upbraidings, and she rated him in no very measured terms for neglect of duty and affection, in so long delaying to come to her side.

“ Ill, dying, as I have been, I might well expect to be the first my son should come to see.” Hoosseïn, in humble and affectionate terms, related what had occurred and excused himself, under the circumstances, from any charge of neglect to which his conduct might have rendered him liable. But the good lady, like some others of her sex, on finding herself met with meekness and humility instead of opposition, went on warming in her anger, until carried away beyond all bounds of prudence, she commenced a violent attack upon his mistress and the Hadjee's family in general.

The extravagance of her displeasure, however, served only to defeat its ends, for Hoos-

sein, roused, in his turn, declared his resolution not to listen to a word against those persons, and fairly told her that he had not returned home, after all his buffetings and mischances, to hear his best friends abused, and himself rated like a culprit, for no other cause than her caprice. The good woman, finding that she had got somewhat out of her depth, drew back, and sought to sooth her son in her turn ; and matters being thus brought to a mutual understanding, her mind took another direction, and she eagerly desired him to make her acquainted with all that had lately befallen him, and, particularly, to set her mind at rest about the fate of the Khan, his master, and his present condition, if still alive.

“ For,” remarked she, “ as you who were so confidently reported to be dead, prove to be still alive, who can tell what lies may have been told about the Khan himself? By your life, my soul ! tell me then the truth ;” and, starting up in her bed, she convulsively seized the hand of Hoossein, who was seated on the ground, beside her.

“ Alas, mother ! what can I say ?—you *have* heard the truth. The Khan, the blessings of Allah rest on him ! is gone to taste the joys of Paradise !”

“ Ahi !” screamed the poor woman, obviously

in great and real agitation. “Then all indeed is over! Ai wahi! Ai wahi! And has it come to this? Is this the end of all?” and back she fell upon the couch in a passion of violent grief. In vain did Hoossein seek to calm and comfort her; in vain did he entreat her to declare the cause of this extravagant sorrow; for some minutes her agitation continued unabated, till at length, confounded, as well as astonished, he said,

“Mother, mother! this is too much. I loved the Khan, and I have mourned for him. I still mourn for him, for to you he was a good friend, and to me a kind master. But what can be said? Was it not God’s will?—and, after all, he was neither your father, your brother, nor your husband.”

“Allah, Allah!” shrieked she again, “be silent, boy, you know not what you say!—Oh, heaven! I shall go mad! Father? Husband? Ah, more—more than either, Hoossein, he was *your father*, boy—*your father*!”

“Soobhan Ullah!” exclaimed Hoossein. “Then it was indeed my father’s head that lay dying in my lap!”

CHAPTER III.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

THE distress of the two principal families of Ameenabâd, arising from the painful and mysterious absence of Hoosseïn, had for long thrown a gloom over the village, and great, accordingly, was the joy which his arrival and that of his faithful foster brother in safety after all their perils and adventures diffused amongst its simple inhabitants. It will readily be supposed that Ausieh, in recovering her lover, soon also recovered her bloom and beauty; the Hadjee regained his usual tranquil happiness, and the whole household reassumed the aspect of comfort they had lost; nor did the illness of the mother of Hoosseïn continue long after the arrival of her son, and the remarkable explanation which had followed. This explanation, which, however, remained a secret between them, appeared to have mightily eased her mind, while the total demolition of her airy

castles, by the death of the Khan and ruin of his affairs, seemed to have reconciled her to the prospect of an humbler lot for her darling Hoossein ; and though his union with Ausieh was still a bitter draught, she saw the hopelessness of further opposition, and ceased to offer it.

As for the honest Kerbelai, the equanimity of his soul had been but little disturbed, although his domestic comfort had been infringed upon by the effects of his wife's illness. He loved Hoossein too, as well as he was capable of loving any thing besides himself, and so he rejoiced in his return, but still more in the cheerfulness which it was the means of restoring to his house and the village circle. In short, the affairs of Ameenabâd returned to their ancient footing, and Hoossein resumed his former village occupations with the more alacrity, that they afforded him the means of constant and delicious intercourse with his mistress ; an intercourse now tenfold more welcome from the long interruption it had suffered. Daily, indeed, did he find new charms in the simple and affectionate demeanour of Ausieh, who, on her side, could not deny that Hoossein was greatly improved in looks as well as manly bearing by his late adventurous life, while his tenderness to her had no whit decreased.

All parties were satisfied and pleased. The only thing they wanted to their happiness was the complete and final union of the lovers, and this the Hadjee declared could not take place till the *paees* or fall of the year; that season, he said, had been indicated as the most lucky period by a learned astrologer of his acquaintance, and he had resolved never to commit the imprudence of flying in the face of destiny. Perhaps the good Hadjee, after all that had passed, conceived it a point of prudence to allow some time to elapse, and to watch his grand son-in-law elect, before he finally committed to his keeping the happiness of his beloved child.

In the meantime the village affairs went on as formerly; the flocks and herds were sent to the yeilâhs to feed on the rich mountain pastures, accompanied by the greater number of the inhabitants; these pleasant pastoral avocations being only interrupted by the exciting incident of an occasional visit from their Buchtiaree neighbours, with whom, as we have learned from the gallant Caussim, they now and then had a skirmish, and who, sometimes, surprised and carried off a few sheep or cattle.

As autumn wore on, the higher yeilâks were deserted; the inhabitants returned to their homes, and the herds and flocks were left in

the nearer pasture grounds, where they were watched, as usual in Persian villages, by parties of the young men, who were relieved at stated times.

It was on this duty that Hoossein and his foster brother were engaged when the incident occurred with which our tale commences, and on the morrow he was to return to the village, where certain arrangements were to be made, connected with that long wished for event, his marriage with Ausieh.

The day was already far spent, and more than one pair of bright eyes had for some time been watching for the arrival of the party from the mountains, when the sound of horses' feet ascending the pathway that led from the glen attracted the notice of the villagers. An arrival from this quarter being almost necessarily that of a stranger, was always an interesting circumstance in a place so remote from the great highways ; and the attention of many being immediately directed to discover who the travellers might be, in due time it was reported that they consisted of five mounted men, who were pushing on, though the way lay up hill, at a brisk pace.

Of these five, two rode in advance of the rest, and, to the consternation of the villagers, it was

remarked, by the more knowing among the beholders, that one of the strangers wore the dress, arms, and general appearance of a King's Gholaum. Such a phenomenon had not, for years, been seen at Ameenabâd, so that the astonishment and dismay of its inhabitants may be conceived. The men turned out to gaze upon the unwelcome strangers, while the women ran to conceal themselves, so as to see these alarming visitors without been seen by them. The customary hospitality of Persian villagers, especially those of pastoral districts, appeared all at once to have been suspended; for not a soul of all the lookers on evinced the smallest disposition to tender the usual welcome to the travellers, until the Hadjee, who had been reposing himself in his *anderoon*, hearing of the circumstance, came forth, and chiding his countrymen for their neglect, proceeded to receive the new comers.

By the time the worthy Hadjee had done this, the men had entered his Meheleh, and were making right for the house of the Zâbit. The displeasure of their leader, the Gholaum, roused by the lowering looks and obvious dislike of the villagers, had already been expressed in muttered threats and curses, and now broke out in full force upon the Zâbit,

as he presented himself at the door of his dwelling.

Unmoved by the white beard and venerable looks of the old man, he heaped abuse upon him. "How now, unsainted dog!" exclaimed he, "what news is this? no attendance? no decency? The Shah's officer rides into your jehanum* of a village, and no one gives him the *selaam-ul-aleicoom*, or the *khoosh amedeed*!† any more than if he were a dog or a Jew? Nay, by the head of Allee, to judge by their looks, they seem far more inclined to help him to a stick or a stone, than to a dinner! Ahah! by the King's salt, we shall have to teach them their duty. Open your eyes, old man! is this the Shah's village, or is it not? am I the King's Gholaum, or am I not? By the golden dome of Meshed, we shall see; down with your neck, old villain, that I may use it as a footstool in dismounting!"

"Friend," replied the venerable Hadjee, with perfect calmness, "it may be well for thee, that some of my friends are not within hearing of what thou hast just said, for they might resent thy rudeness to their old Zâbit, somewhat more roughly than thou mightest like, or

* Hell.

† Welcome.

I approve: for myself, thy words are as wind; I heed them not, and forgive thee for uttering them. If thou art, indeed, an officer of the Shah, *Bismillah!* set foot to the earth, and tell thy errand. For more than twice thy age have I eaten the King's salt, and I can respect his commands, though borne by an unworthy messenger."

"Dog of a boor!" growled the Gholaum, "thou shalt rue this insolence!" But the number of stout young fellows who now began to muster round the gateway, and whose eyes fell with no friendly expression on the strangers, seemed to check the arrogant spirit, and receiving a whispered remonstrance from his companion, his voice sunk into a murmur, as he added, "Well, well, the day will come; be sure the day will come;" and, with these words, both descended from their horses, and having given the reins into the hands of their two attendants, they demanded to be shown into the best house in the place, and that the Zâbit should instantly attend them.

"Both these demands shall be complied with," said the old man in reply; for I am the Zâbit, and I request you will now enter my house, which is always at the service of strangers, even when not officers of the Shah."

With haughty air, and still grumbling as he went, the Gholaum, after issuing some orders to his attendants, moved through the entrance to the Hadjee's public apartment, where, very unceremoniously seating himself in the highest place, while his companion took that next to him, he left to the old man no choice but that of seating himself below his rude guests. "Bring calleeoons," roared the Gholaum, to those who had entered after him; and, at a signal from the Hadjee, his own servants went to fetch them.

"This may do, Nazir; what think you?" said the Gholaum, gazing round the room, without paying the smallest attention to those it contained, his host included.

"*Bud neest!* it is not so bad," responded the person addressed, throwing an inquiring glance about him; "but we must see the anderoon."

"Do you hear, old fellow," roared the Gholaum again, "what have you got within? I do not mean wives, mashallah! they must be all past work; though you old white beards do sometimes contrive to get hold of a cypress waist, or a tulip cheek, to comfort your old bones, too, eh, Nazir: but what chambers have you? How many can you accommodate?"

A murmur of disapprobation ran round the room and communicated itself to those who filled the court outside, on hearing this rude address to one, whom all the village regarded with attachment and respect; and symptoms of a more active display of anger were beginning to evince themselves, when the Hadjee waving his hand for peace and silence, addressed the strangers, “ You have become my guests, Agas, and as such, so long as ye observe the rules of good breeding and abuse not the usages of hospitable treatment, ye have a right to my forbearance and protection. From hard words or insult no good can arise; I, therefore, pray that you will either accept of such refreshment as we can offer, and then state your business with me, without further remark, or that you will at once do so, and thus enable me to comprehend what is required of me.”

“ All this is mighty well, you old *fuzool* !* but though you don’t know my business, you know that I am a Gholaum-e-Shah; and that persons of that consequence do not honour such a threshold as this by stepping over it, without an adequate present to propitiate them.

* Anglice, *Twaddler*.

By the Shah's crown, I should have insisted on a *pa-endáz** before I entered your gate, had I been right !”

“And if you had, you might have staid outside till hunger made you wiser,” said the old man, whose indignation now began to rise. “Know you ? I do know you for an insolent coxcomb, who deserves to be turned out from under the roof he has wantonly insulted ; an unfaithful servant, who neglects his master's business, in order to indulge his own foolish arrogance, and one whom I shall leave to digest his own folly and this rebuke, as he best pleases :” and the old man rose to leave the room.

“By the sacred head of Allee !” thundered the Gholaum, griping the hilt of his dagger, “I will teach thee to respect the Shah's *ruckum* !” and he was rising as it seemed to put his threats in execution, but the movement in the assembly, seconded by the voice and hand of his companion, who laid hold of the Gholaum's arm, restrained him, while the Hadjee quietly observed—“Whatever the Shah's commands, his servant is ready to obey ; but upon

* The spreading of cloths in the path of a great man, of value corresponding with his rank, on his entering the house of an inferior.

my head be it, thou hast no Shah's *ruckum*, to abuse me in my own house."

"*Yawash! Yawash!* be quiet, man; be contented;" said the second stranger, in a remonstrating tone to his turbulent companion. "And you, too, Hadji, be pacified. Wullah Billah! there is no offence meant; but listen to me, this is the truth. In this person you do really behold a Gholaum of the Shah; in me, the Nazir of Meerza Jemâl-u-deen, Sheikh-ul-Islam of Hamadân, who is proceeding on his way, together with his Royal Highness the August Prince Abbas Meerza, who is to reside in that city for some time, by the Shah's command; and we come to give thee notice, that the Meerza and the Prince are to make their *munzil* with thee, to-morrow, and that thou must prepare the requisite accommodations, and *soorsaut** for them and for their suite. This is our message, and now we desire that thou take measures for obeying the King's commands."

"And art thou the bearer of a *ruckum* to this effect?" inquired the Hadjee.

"Undoubtedly," replied the Nazir.

* Provisions supplied gratis, on government account, for the maintainance of persons travelling on royal business, or with royal passports; a tax dreadfully severe and abused in Persia.

“Behold it,” said the Gholaum; “receive it with due respect.”

“And this, then, is thy ruckum?” said the Hadjee, coldly, after examining with his glasses the paper placed in his hands by the Gholaum. “Why here is neither the King’s signet, nor that of the *Aitemád-u-Dowlut*; * this is no royal ruckum.”

“The ghorumsang reads, it seems,” remarked the Gholaum, with a contemptuous laugh, to the Nazir. “It must serve as such for thee, however, old rebel, or thou shalt fare the worse,” growled he to the Hadjee.

“And I once more tell thee that *thou* shalt fare the worse, if thou art not less uncivil,” replied the old man, with a faint flush of anger colouring his sallow cheeks. The Gholaum once more bristled up in fury, but again awed by the buzz of wrath that rose around him, he contented himself with another forced attempt at a contemptuous laugh, and observing to his companion—

“Nazir, hear ye the boor?”

“Friend Hadjee,” said the less insolent Nazir, “the ruckum, it is true, is sealed, neither by the Shah nor his minister; but thou wilt find, that he who has caused it to be made

* The trusted of the state; a title of the prime minister.

out, is powerful enough to enforce it, and so it may, as my companion says, serve as a royal order. See, then, that thou slight it not."

"Whatever be the power of thy master to enforce, or mine to withhold compliance," replied the Hadjee, I have to inform thee, Nazir, that it is not my purpose to put it to the test. God forbid that the hospitality which this least of the King's servants would extend to the lowest of his subjects should be refused to a prince of the royal house, or to a servant of the most high upon his journey. Let us, therefore, be informed what the amount of thy demand may be."

"Thou hast spoken well, Hadjee," said the Nazir; "thy prudence and thy hospitality are alike commendable. Listen, then, to what I have to say. Our party will be—let me see—the Prince's suite and servants with the harem may amount to a hundred souls. Then my master has along with him, also, a portion of his family, besides his personal establishment, which, with peishkhedmutts and cooks, Shâtirs and tent-pitchers, Jeloodars and grooms, *Sarwâns* and *Churwadars*, with their assistants and followers of various descriptions, toffunchees and spearsmen, may come

to within a trifle of two hundred persons; in all about three hundred, with their horses and baggage cattle; and to that you may add, at least, fifty more, for led horses and other extras.

“For these will be required twenty *Khurwars** of barley, and as many of chopped straw; fifty fat sheep, and a hundred fowls; three thousand eggs, and a hundred and fifty *mauns* † of bread; the same quantity of fine Mazunderan rice, of butter and of sugar; fifty mauns of tobacco; two hundred of grapes, pomegranates, apples, pears, and such fruit; fifty mauns of sweet, a hundred of water melons, a hundred mauns of dried fruits, plums of Bockhara, raisins, apricots, pistachio nuts, &c.; twenty mauns of gezungabeen ‡ and thirty of other sweetmeats; ten of vinegar, and the same of grape treacle, with a list of spices, cinnamon, nutmegs, mace, pickles, *urrucks* for sherbets, uttrs, rosewater and perfumes, as given in this paper which I now place in your hands.

“Besides this, you will do well to recollect that the Meerza himself—a man of the most

* A load of about 700lbs. weight.

† Seven and a quarter pounds each maun.

‡ A sort of manna, much esteemed as a sweetmeat.

eminent sanctity—a saint of the first order, will naturally expect to be propitiated; for he is not one who lavishes his favour on the ungrateful; and decency, as well as duty, will suggest to the Hadjee, that the offspring of the centre of the universe must not illumine the threshold of humility, without being presented with an offering commensurate with his rank. But I am to add that, in consideration that Ameenabâd is not a town, the ceremony of a *Pa-endâz* has been excused. These are the orders which our duty requires that we should lay upon the Zâbit of this village; for the rest, the Hadjee is wise and experienced, he knows what further is regarded as customary.”

A cry of indignation, mingled with alarm, broke forth from the villagers, who heard this terrible demand upon their substance! and even the Hadjee himself seemed aghast with surprise at its extent; but with habitual self-possession recovering himself he replied,

“The words of the Nazir have been understood. With the requisitions of the Sheikh-ul-Islam made for the service of the Shah and the Shahzadeh (whose prosperity may God increase!) we are willing to comply so far as our ability extends; and Allah forbid that their treatment at Ameenabâd should blacken the

faces of its Zâbit or inhabitants ; but the demand now made is much too great ; we cannot supply it. It is a Soorsaut to be levied upon a town like Khonsâr, not upon a poor village.”

“ Nevertheless, friend Zâbit,” replied the Nazir, “ the articles must be provided, as thou wilt find. My master well knows, and thou also knowest, that Ameenabâd is seldom called upon to bear its portion of the royal charges. Be thankful for past forbearance, and show thy good sense by thy obedience.”

“ Ay, and by the King’s head, if the sense should fail, the *feleck* may succeed,” interjected the Gholaum. “ Mashallah ! we have modes of enforcing obedience. What?—the Shah knows how to deal with rebels.”

Without noticing the Gholaum’s brutality, the Hadjee again took up the discourse.

“ Whatever may have been the cause of the tranquillity we have hitherto enjoyed,” said he, “ we give thanks for it to Allah, praying humbly for its continuance. Yet are we not without our burthens ; and I again declare, that to comply with such a demand as you have now made, is impossible. But if it please you to repose awhile, your servant will consult with the elders and the Ryots, and see what can be done.”

“Barikhillah! it is well said,” replied the Nazir. “But, hark in your ear, Hadjee: a word in private before you go. Let these good folks withdraw to a proper distance, and then open your ears. Listen to what I shall say, for perhaps you may find us more your friends than you give us credit for.”

“Inshallah! Please God!” said the Hadjee, rather incredulously; and saying a few words to his fellow villagers, they retired out of ear shot, while he, advancing towards the Gholaum and Nazir, took his seat just in front, so that the three heads might be laid so closely together that none of their communications could be overheard.

“You must know then, Baba (father)” said the Nazir, “that such as you have heard them are our orders; and this worthy friend here is bound to see them enforced, or in default, to inflict on the village the pains and penalties due to rebels. But what then? After all we are not beasts; we are reasonable, by your head, we are! And who can tell, but some means of accommodation may be arrived at that shall please all parties—eh?”

“Well—Inshallah!” again ejaculated the Hadjee, in the same incredulous tone.

“Then what is it in the Soorsaut,” said the Nazir, “that you complain of?”

“Let it be represented,” replied the Hadjee, “that your servant complains of the whole. The amount of articles is altogether excessive, and there are many things enumerated, which my coutrymen never thought of, even in a dream! When were, *urruks* and *uttrs*, and spices, and rose water ever seen in a Buchtiaree village? You might as well look for rubies among the pebbles of that stream.”

“Well, suppose a compromise could be made for these delicacies. Suppose the Meerza should excuse them, and consent to permit his own servants to supply him in consideration a sum of ready cash—hah! How do you say?”

“All would depend upon the amount required. Where are poor Ryots, like us, to find ready money? But, name the sum you would expect.”

“Why, as for the corn and straw, and the bread, and rice, and butter, and sheep, and such things, there is nothing for it, but to produce them. They must be had. But, if an influential friend were to exert himself with the Meerza, it is possible that a sum of fifty tomauns in gold might be accepted as an equivalent for the rest.”

“ Fifty tomauns !” exclaimed the Gholaum. “ Are you mad, Nazir ? Wallah, Billah ! It is too little—it will never do !—and then, what does he expect that persons like us—?”

“ Peace, friend,” said the Nazir, interrupting him, and affecting a soothing tone. “ Have patience, give me leave ; you see the Hadjee is becoming reasonable. I do not say, that it positively can be done, but as I have truly a regard—by your head, I have conceived a great friendship for him ; by the salt of the Meerza, I have, Hadjee—you see in me the man to negotiate matters, however difficult.”

“ Agas,” replied the Hadjee, calmly, “ I will tell you the truth. We are here in a remote district, poor, but not without means of living ; willing to discharge the duties of hospitality and to obey the orders of our sovereign ; but jealous of coercion or interference, from which happily, we have hitherto been much exempted. The Soorsaut you have demanded, both in money and in goods, is more than we can pay. It is true—I have it said : but for the sake of peace and quietness, we shall be found willing to stretch a point. In one word, I, as Zâbit of the village, take upon me to promise that one half the required corn and straw, with the common provisions, shall be forthcoming. I will also lay at the feet of the Shahzadeh

twenty tomauns; at those of the Meerza fifteen. It is known to me also, Agas, that such men as you are do not come under the roof of a poor Ketkhodah, upon an errand of this nature, without expectancies. Your servant is but little able to do great things; but what he can he will—an acknowledgment of his good will shall not be wanting.”

“By your death, Nazir, this stuff may do for you to listen to, but I cannot afford to have my ears wearied for nothing. Let the Zâbit, if Zâbit he be, answer in one word: will he comply with your conditions, or will he not?”

“Softly, softly, man!” said the peace-making Nazir; “on my head be it, the Hadjee will listen to reason. Say on, Hadjee.”

“Well, Agas, five tomauns a piece in gold, shall be yours, together with a couple of pieces of that rare stuff for which our village is famous, as a dress—besides a couple of fat-tailed sheep, with their lambs.”

“May the old fool’s father be roasted!—Curses seize the churl!” exclaimed the Gholaum, in a burst of impatient wrath. “A proper present, indeed, for men of our condition! Nazir, let the old rebel alone. The Meerza must manage him himself.”

Penah-bur-khoda, man, — Hadjee! are

you in your senses? Will you let that man without mercy go to my Aga with such a reply? In the name of God, if you hope to thrive, grease his palm, man; grease his palm. Make the tomauns ten—turn the useless sheep into useful gold, and we shall see what can be done. Be wise, man—be wise, and reasonable.”

“Reasonable, your servant would fain be, and he is wise enough to seek for peace and tranquillity, even at a high price; but he has told the truth—the Ryots can do no more, and it will rest with you and the Meerza to choose between what is now offered, with willing service, and tenantless houses and an empty village. The Agas know that the mountains are behind us; the season is still fine, and your servant cannot prevent the people from flying to them.

“Fly to the mountains, eh? Let them; they will find burnt houses and empty granaries, on their return. Friend Hadjee, we are no fools, we understand that sort of work. The villagers will not be such asses.”

“Worthy Nazir, the people are not asses; they love their homes, and much would it pain them to leave them. But the evil of remaining may be worse than that of flying. Despair

makes men mad ; and if it delight the Meerza to see, and the Shah to hear, that Ameenabâd has been reduced to the same condition as Nodeh and Begzadeh and Noorabad and nearly all upon the great route, that satisfaction may, no doubt, be theirs. But my people will be impatient ; I must return to them. Permit me to take leave, Agas.”

The Nazir and his friend now held earnest discourse for a while, after which the former, after replying to some observation of the Gholaum, with a significant wink, and the emphatic enunciation of “ Be cheshm ! ” turned to the Hadjee, and said :

“ We are content, father. Return to thy people ; but weigh well what I have said. Spare thou not thy garment to save thy skin. — Act not like the man who got drowned in the well, because he would not buy himself rope enough to draw the water. May Allah enlighten thy judgment ! ”

The Hadjee then withdrew, and calling together the principal heads of families, laid before them the whole state of the case, with the conversation that had passed between himself and the Nazir. Their uneasiness was extreme, and their opinions, as usually happens in cases of difficulty, were various and conflict-

ing. Some were for immediately burying or concealing all their portable effects, and taking at once to the mountains, with their families. Others were desirous of calling upon their friend and allies, and braving the storm, defying the Meerza and all his power.

“What is the Shah?” said they. “He is too much engaged in playing priest at Ispahan, to mind what we may make of one at Ameenabâd. We are too much out of his way to attract any notice.”

“Are you mad?” exclaimed another. “The Sheikh-ul-Islam’s friends at court, would give the Shah no rest, till he had burned all our houses, and cut every throat he could get at.”

“Ay, Baba,—that he could get at; but where is Ispahan and where Ameenabâd? and are we to make no account of our friends of the Eeliaut? What is the use of all we give them, and the good turns we have often done them, unless in times like these, to secure support and shelter? Such a storm as this does not come once in twenty years. Then there is Caleb Allee, Khan of Khonsâr, he owes us an act of friendship also.”

“Ay, ay; no doubt our Buchtiaree neighbours are very good in their way, and were the

quarrel with a Louree chief, or a low country Khan, they would help us readily enough, if there were a reasonably good chance of plunder. But the Shah's officers make it another affair, and the truth is, that the less we trust them, or ask of them the better ; we pay dear enough, as it is. As for Caleb Allee, he can shear as close as others. No, no, the evil day has fallen on us, and we must bear it as we may. My advice is, that the Hadjee make the best terms he can with these wolves, and that we try to pay as little as possible ; conceal our valuables, put our wives and daughters out of the way, and let the storm pass over us, as it lists."

" But after all, what does the Hadjee himself say ?" observed one who had not before spoken. " It is to him we must trust ; the Hadjee is the man to save us, if any one can."

And several voices joined in saying, " Ay, ay, the Hadjee, what does he say ?"

" My friends," replied the old man, " no doubt our predicament is an unfortunate one, and we feel it the more, being, thanks to Allah, less accustomed to such attacks than most others. But something must immediately be done, and after using our best judgment in deciding on the course to be taken, we have but to pursue it boldly. Defiance would be

impolitic, even if we should succeed in averting the storm for the time, for it would be certain of attracting to us a dangerous degree of notice. On the other hand a too easy compliance with exorbitant terms might provoke a speedy repetition of similar extortion. It is true that we have a ready retreat into the mountains ; but who, as has been well observed by our extortioners, would lightly abandon his pleasant home to destruction, or who would trust an ally when his own arm may deliver him ? To treat, is better than to fight, therefore let us make the best terms we can, and as it is better to fill one hungry mouth than to waste our substance upon many, let us not spare in buying the good word of this Nazir, though his maw be like a wolf's belly, and his purse like an empty corn sack ; for he has his master's ear in his hand, and his bridle is in the mouth of that blustering Gholaum. I propose, therefore, to make terms for half the demand. Of this, I will myself cheerfully bear one third, the rest must be apportioned, according to each man's means, on the community. Yet while we come to this resolution, let us not omit other means of safety, in case of unlooked for violence or plunder. Let each man make such arrangement of his goods and

household as he may deem the best ; not that I myself anticipate any such attempt. These greedy hounds, once filled, will be in no hurry to return ; but should I be mistaken, God forbid that any of my friends should suffer through advice of mine ; each man, as I said, must judge and act for himself as to the precautions he may take for the future ; and now, my children, God be with us all ! I must return to my unwelcome guests.”

Such was the result of a long and anxious discussion ; and it appeared that the good Zâbit had not miscalculated in his opinion of the Nazir ; for not only did that worthy official consent to the terms proposed, with considerable symptoms of satisfaction, but he managed to silence, if not to content the cupidity of his sulky and turbulent companion, whose growls, though still audible, were emitted in a more subdued, and less offensive tone.

The bustle of preparation now commenced. The various habitations of the village were examined, and accommodations selected for the several personages of the expected party ; carpets and numuds were brought forth, chambers swept, spaces for placing baggage pointed out, and all the duty of the quartermaster’s department proceeded rapidly under

the superintendence of the Nazir and his assistants.

At the same time, no small bustle might have been perceived among the villagers themselves ; and horses, mules and asses, even bullocks were loaded with packages of various sorts darted along the less obvious pathways, and through the ravines towards the mountains. Men, women and children, loaded with sundry articles were in motion, and little bands of the younger females, under care of the elders, followed the cattle, casting frequent curious looks behind them, as if not altogether satisfied with leaving a spot, where so much of interest and excitement was soon expected.

On the other hand, large loads of grain and bags of chopped straw began to arrive at the several munzils ; but much more left the place to be stowed in the secret and more distant repositories belonging to the village—places contrived in case of accident or pillage reaching the ordinary granaries ; and every possible means were taken to secure other articles of property in the same way, as if an enemy had been about to enter the place. Whether this movement was seen by any of the Nazir's people, is uncertain ; at all events, no notice was taken, and probably they were

too much occupied with their own arrangements, to remark what others were about. As for the Gholaum, he had growled himself to sleep upon a pile of cushions, after a hearty meal washed down with plenty of wine.

It was towards evening, and while the bustle was at its height, that Hoosseïn arrived at the village. Confounded at the scene which met his eyes, he sought for information as to the cause. But in vain did he inquire at his own house, the women had already left it. The Kerbelai himself, busied in the village affairs, was absent; the Ryots running hither and thither could furnish him with nothing but hideous and improbable reports; so, filled with indefinable alarms, he rushed across the stream, and mounted to the dwelling of the Hadjee. Here, at least, he found less confusion, and soon meeting the venerable owner he became acquainted with all that had happened.

Considerations of loss or gain are not those which first occur to a youthful mind. Hoosseïn's first emotion was that of intense indignation at so glaring an outrage as to him unaccustomed to extortion in this authorised shape the whole proceeding appeared. His second was that of alarm, obscure indeed, and undefined, but poignant; for what lover dreads

not, in any unusual and threatening occurrence, some influence adverse to his love?

“Then you will, of course, send Ausieh and your family from the place?—I am ready to attend them, when and whither you please,” said he, addressing the Hadjee.

“By no means,” replied the old man, “I have no such thought. They are perfectly safe here; no one will harm them, and why should I show to others an alarm, I do not, and should not feel. We have come to an arrangement with our guests; they, like us, are now bound by the laws of hospitality; why should we doubt their good faith? Nay, to show alarm is the true way to put evil thoughts in their heads; it betrays weakness; and though I have permitted and advised every man to act as he thought best, in my opinion, too much alarm has been shown already.”

“But your own house has been prepared to receive the strangers?”

“Assuredly; the Meerza is to lodge in it, and from a man of God, a Sheikh-ul-Islam, what can we have to fear?”

“May God grant there be no cause! I wish I could quiet my fears.”

“Ah, my son, you are young; you are a lover; to fear is but natural for you.”

“Ah, my father, it is only for Ausieh that I fear; in God’s name, permit me to take her to some place of safety!”

“Peace, my son; believe me, an old grandfather like me, is the best protector for his child. Ausieh is safe; she shall be well cared for, and as for you, we cannot spare you, Hoossein; we shall want all our young men to overawe these kuzzilbashes and maintain the peace, which you dread may be broken.”

Hoossein could remonstrate no further; indeed, he scarcely had any grounds on which to do so; he had not even witnessed the overbearing conduct of the Gholaum, which the Hadjee had in some degree suppressed in his account; so that, however distasteful to him the arrangement of the old man might be, he was forced to acquiesce; and joining the rest of his companions in their labours, the night passed in that subdued bustle and uneasy excitement which generally precede the occurrence of some dreaded event.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHEIKH-UL-ISLAM.

THE forenoon was nearly over before the approach of a horseman warned the Nâzir that the expected party was at no great distance; and that official, sending back the messenger to intimate that the munzil was ready, instantly mounted and prepared to meet his master, attended by the Zâbit, who in spite of his age, on this occasion, mounted an ancient steed, to do honour to the blood of the sovereign of Persia.

A certain number of the principal inhabitants attended to form a respectable *Peishwáz* or *Istackball*; a few bottles of sweatmeats were provided to be thrown under the feet of the royal steed, and a sheep or two were in attendance to be beheaded as the Shahzadeh passed by; with these preparatives the party proceeded to meet their expected guests. In no long time, the cavalcade was observed winding along the path upon the mountain side; and

it was no difficult matter to distinguish the Sheikh-ul-Islam, as he rode on an ambling mule of great size and beauty, among the shâtirs and numerous religious persons of various orders who ran beside and before him, and the mingled crowd of Jelowdars, spearsmen and priests, who rode behind, upon animals of all descriptions.

The Meerza was a portly, good looking personage, whose appearance, though from his sedentary habits inclining to corpulence, scarcely indicated his having attained the middle age. A huge turban of a green shawl overshadowed his broad forehead, and his keen and brilliant dark eyes shone, with an overpowering lustre, from under thick black brows finely arched but ominously knit at their junction. His nose was high and hooked, and the lower part of his face was covered by a splendid black beard. The full, red, fleshy lips which parted this dark mass, were perhaps the only features which would have indicated, to a physiognomist, the sensuality which reigned under that sanctified exterior. His garb was plain, even to affectation. The coarse brown kabba (or gown) which enveloped his person was partly covered by a dark Arab cloak, and his waist was encircled by a shawl of

Kerman wool; yet he bestrode his mule with an air of command, which, perhaps he sought not to control; though a prudent self-restraint did somewhat tame the haughty glance, which betrayed the pride and scorn that swelled his heart.

For one moment, as the Nazir and his companions dismounted to salute him, did his eye seem to rest upon the venerable person of the Hadjee; but his slight acknowledgment of the other's humble obeisance was succeeded by an air of fixed abstraction, intended at once to impose upon the minds of his observers, and to relieve him from receiving or returning those civilities which seemed indeed foreign to his nature.

A rumour, which soon gained ground, that the Prince was not in company but detained somewhere about Khonsar, was the means of saving the throats of the sheep, as their slaughter was a compliment deemed only due to royal blood; but the sugar-candy was showered under the feet of the Meerza's mule, and the air was rent by the acclamations, not only of the holy man's followers, but of the very populace who, the night before, showered curses on his name and seemed ready to tear him in pieces.

Arrived at the village, the Nazir, with the

Hadjee, marshalled the great man to his intended abode at the house of the latter. Callees were called for, presents brought and accepted, and formal compliments commenced; while the rest of the party and the servants dispersed far and wide through the village to prepare the munzils of their respective masters. Shoutings, hollowings, demands, abuse, protestations, excuses, blows, cries, quarrels, and confusion of all sorts, arose and were the order of the day for a long time, until, at length, each of the party having walked, or bounced, or bolted, or elbowed, or insinuated himself into his respective place, the uproar ceased for a season. Breakfast, usually a slight, but on this occasion, a solid meal, succeeding the morning's journey, disposed most of the travellers to rest; and, in fact, carpets and horsecloths were immediately spread, and almost every one abandoned himself to repose.

To describe at full length all the scenes and incidents, which such an inroad on the tranquillity of a peaceable village never fails to produce, would require more graphic skill than we possess. A detail of the efforts of systematic extortion on the one hand, and the struggles of adroit evasion on the other, the reciprocal complaints, the blows, the abuse, and final ad-

justment of differences, might furnish a curious volume. In one place might be seen a miserable villager, brought by two truculent fellows before the Nazir, beaten, wounded, covered with dust and blood, his clothes torn from his back, and he himself otherwise sorely maltreated. He is abused as the veriest scoundrel for attempting perhaps to abstract a small portion of the corn, his own—which he had been compelled to supply; for running away with his own property; for failing to lay down his best numuds in the room which he had been forced to give up to his tyrants; for refusing to assist in cleaning their horses, rubbing down their mules, camels, asses (while he, whose duty it was to do the work, solaced himself with a pipe) or for some equally heinous offence; when the said Nazir, or Gholaum, or officer of the guard, or some other official, would suddenly call for the furoshes and the feleck, up with his heels, lay on with the sticks, and make the place resound with his roarings and vain *amaums*!

Another poor wretch, having by strength or luck mastered his oppressors, comes running to claim protection from the august authority, and shouts and drums at the door of the Hadjee for admission and for safety; while, after him, foaming with rage, come his baffled pur-

suers, one of them showing a moustache torn off in the scuffle; another, a tooth knocked out by the club of his assailant. Torn garments, inflamed countenances, attest the impatient wrath with which they bear the turn of fortune against themselves. In one quarter, a profligate soldier, while seizing a female, is knocked down by her husband or father, who instantly escapes by some bye way, and eludes his furious pursuer. In another, an old man is pulled by the beard and dragged along the ground, because he seeks to save his family from outrage, or his property from pillage.

But in time, even these squalls subside, or spend their fury, in the abuse of which Persians are so liberal; a truce is established, and parties come to reciprocal accommodation, or withdraw, glaring on each other, with a watchful rage, which exhaustion and a conviction of the uselessness of the contest alone prevent from blazing out afresh.

The hour of evening prayer aroused the sleepers, and sundry preparatives announced the approach of the *Shám*, or evening meal, which is always of a more solid and important character than that of *Nahar*, or breakfast. The Meerza, who assumed all the simple humility of a priest, could not avoid giving ad-

mission to all the holy men of his retinue, as well as to his venerable host, to share his evening fare; to the latter he now appeared disposed to extend a singular portion of his favour. When the meal was over and a calceoon had been smoked, the Meerza signified his desire to retire to the Hadjee's *khehwut*, or private apartment, which had been repaired for his convenience, and further intimated a wish for the company of his host.

In this retirement, to which, besides the Hadjee, there were only admitted an eunuch belonging, it was understood, to the royal harem, and a confidential servant of the Meerza's, that worthy personage showed a disposition to relent. He entered into more familiar discourse with his host, confining himself at first to remarks and inquiries respecting the village, its population and produce, the time he had officiated as its Zâbit, and such other topics, interlarding his observations with certain laudatory remarks and hints that his Majesty was by no means ignorant of the treasure he possessed in the Zâbit of Ameenabâd. He next shifted his ground to the Hadjee's own family, inquired as to the comfort and prosperity of his circumstances, desired to know the number of his household—adverted, interrogatively, to his own

habits of life, and hinted in a sly way his conviction, that an old traveller like him in this weary world must have discovered how needless it was to be over-scrupulous in regard to certain indulgences understood by the vulgar to be interdicted by the Prophet, and which were forbidden in reality to the people in general, but with a reserve in favour of those who knew how to use, without abusing the bounties of Allah.

He referred to a discretionary power, which he said had been left in the hands and wills of pious and worthy believers possessed of this important knowledge, and expressed his conviction that his worthy host was among these privileged individuals.

Observing that all these hints were lost upon the simple-hearted Hadjee, the Meerza had recourse to another expedient in order to secure for himself, without scandal, the indulgence of a gratification which had become too habitual to be easily dispensed with. He complained of his own feeble health, the consequence of intense study, and the rigorous discharge of the arduous duties of his station; and regretted that in travelling, particularly, his uneasiness became so great as to oblige him to have recourse to a medicine of approved efficacy, pre-

pared for his use by the Hakeem-bashee,* which would relieve his distress, and enable him to resume his march on the following day.

As he said this, he made a signal to his servant, who brought the specific. It was a liquid contained in a large glass vessel, which, when opened, exhaled a flavour that caused the worthy Hadjee some amazement; yet, it must be a mistake, he thought, for how could the holy person, in whose presence he sat, be supposed capable of aught that was not perfectly orthodox and correct?

The Sheikh-ul-Islam's sufferings must, however, have been severe; for not once, nor twice, but many times, did he receive this specific from the hands of his servant, until at length the desired effect appeared to be produced; his countenance visibly assumed a more placid expression, and although his eye still shone with what might have passed for a feverish lustre, there was an obvious placidity, both in voice and air, that indicated relief from pain.

His conversation now became more familiar, and his interest in the Hadjee's affairs appeared vastly to increase. He insisted on obtaining further particulars of the old man's family, and

* Head physician.

expressed a strong desire to be of service to the progeny of so worthy a person. His influence he boasted of as powerful, even with the highest authorities, and nothing, he declared, would give him greater pleasure than to exert it in favour of his kind host. If he, himself, were contented with his station, and had no wish to change it, had he no son, or son-in-law, or grandson, who might be benefited by his good-will? The Hadjee expressed his gratitude, but assured his would-be benefactor, that all of his family were, Alhumdulillah! as comfortably situated as himself; that they were peasants—Ryots, who gained their bread like other villagers, but who had no wishes beyond their station; thus the baffled guest could only praise his uncommon moderation, and reiterate his good wishes.

“But, Hadjee,” said he, at last, after a period of ruminating silence; “you must be aware that men of my holy character have privileges, which to others are denied. We enjoy the favour of royalty, and claim a portion of the rights that belong to kings. I am now in your khelwut, and am gratified to find a worthy man, like you, so sensible of the benefit and blessing to be derived from our holy presence and discourse. But why should any of your

inmates be excluded from this advantage? Assemble your family here around you. Let those whose presence would so much embellish these walls, and who, if my ears deceive me not, are at no great distance, be introduced, and receive my blessing. How now? Why do you hesitate? You surely are aware of the blessed influence conferred upon a harem, by the presence of the holy and the just? Nor is it from eyes such as mine you would conceal them. As for this friend, this Aga here, he also has his privileges. He knows every chamber in the royal harem; ay, and every bright eye and tulip-cheek that inhabits them. Come, then, Bismillah—give the order, and produce your ladies!”

“May the favour of the Meerza increase! May the house of the holy Sheikh-ul-Islam prosper!” said the Hadjee. “All I have is an offering to him; but what should an old man, like me, do with tulip-cheeks and bright eyes? Except a few old women, withered and wrinkled, like myself, what should my harem contain?”

“Nay, Hadjee, but you jest; you verily are a man of men; and we are not ignorant of the ways of persons of your experience. What need of more? Up, man, thyself, and give the word. Let yonder *Purdeh* lift its charm-con-

cealing veil; we would judge in such matters for ourselves; and let not those who pant for the blessing of holy intercourse be doomed to pine in vain. Nay, Aga, see thou to it; the Hadjee is as coy as a girl, lift thou yon curtain, and let in the sunshine of charms which that envious cloud, no doubt, conceals!"

The curiosity of the females of the Hadjee's household had, in fact, led them to congregate at the inner entrance of the *Khelwut*, where they could hear all that passed, themselves, unseen; and their voices, and smothered laughter did occasionally become audible behind the curtain; while the Hadjee, not a little confused by a request implying rights sufficiently odious in themselves and claimed by royalty alone, was debating with himself how best to refuse compliance, the eunuch, accustomed to deal in such cases, rose from his seat with alertness and withdrew the curtain, ere those behind it were well aware of his purpose.

The rush immediately heard within gave sufficient token that some, at least, of the listeners had made their escape, and the three or four who remained did not certainly belie the Hadjee's words, for more wrinkled hags could scarcely have been collected together.

“Wullah! exclaimed the priest. “These may, indeed, at one time have been sources of delight, but assuredly the stream has run dry; for more parched and withered channels I have never seen! But my eyes upon it, these are not all. What, Hadjee, has become of the young blossom of that dear son, of whom thou didst lately speak? I venture my life, she is not among those before me. In God’s name, to save your own credit, man, and to deliver me, your guest, from the depressing influence of these venerable grandmothers, let the child appear! Let her come and receive my blessing.”

The distress of the worthy Hadjee increased exceedingly; perplexed and confounded at the strain assumed by his imperious guest, he hesitated in utter uncertainty how to act.

“I would beg to represent,” he began; but his doubts and representations were alike cut short by the rapid movements of the eunuch, who at that moment made towards the *anderoon* with so determined a step, that the old lady, who was chief of the harem, thought it better to anticipate his purpose. Casting a look at the Hadjee, she besought the holyman’s forbearance, and promised that the maiden should attend.

Impatience sparkled in the eyes of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, as they watched the curtained entrance of the *anderoon*, which rose at length, when in came the blushing, pouting Ausieh, half curious, half resenting the gentle violence which thus dragged her forward, whether she would or not, into the presence of a stranger. Unaccustomed to seclusion, her sense of this indelicate exposure was less keen than would have been felt by city dames; and the reluctance of true maiden modesty was tempered by a consideration of the holy character of him who desired her presence, and in whom she expected to see some venerable personage, such perhaps, as her grandfather. But the swellings of indignant and wayward pride, which began to agitate her breast at finding her mistake, were speedily changed into the tremblings of alarm, as her glance fell upon the imposing figure and bold, dark, piercing eye of the Sheikh-ul-Islam.

Shrinking like the coy plant that droops at the touch of a stranger, Ausieh turned to fly, raising her arm instantly as if to lower the slight veil, which she occasionally wore; but no such friendly screen being there, she covered her face with both her hands and would have hid herself behind her aged companion. But

that discreet personage addressing her in a few encouraging words quietly urged her forward in such a way as displayed the whole grace of her form—a grace which was by no means diminished by her manifest confusion.

“*Afereen* Hadjee!” exclaimed the Meerza, after gazing with eager eyes for a while on this fair vision. “Was I not right? Said I not well, that the young lamb would be found worth all the old ewes of the flock? *Mas-hallah*! maiden, there is no cause either for shame or for alarm. Take courage then, here there are none but friends. Let not therefore, the moon be hid in clouds. Hide not the lustre of these stars! What, still trembling? Be seated, fair one. The Hadjee permits thee!”

“Your servant entreats that the poor girl may be excused,” said the Hadjee, who began to find the scene unpleasant. “My granddaughter is young, and quite unaccustomed to such a presence. I pray you, give her leave. Let her retire.”

“Retire, Hadjee? The dawn has scarce broken; and would you have the sun set already? Be it far from thee, lovely maiden, to inflict such wrong upon thy father’s guest! By your head, Aga, what say you? Is she not

a houri of Paradise, a *Peri-roo* ?* What was Zuleikah? What was Leilah? Behold here the tulip-cheek and the antelope-eye. Behold the rose-bud, with which the nightingale would seek to dwell! By the Shah's august head, this were a jewel for the crown itself! a pearl fit to be strung upon the royal chaplet; eh, Aga? Is it not as I say? A flower with half the sweetness of this has before now been placed in the bosom of a king." The Aga and the Priest here exchanged with each other, looks of a very significant nature.

"And what saidst thou is thy grandchild's name?" inquired the Sheikh-ul-Islam.

"Thy servant would state that her name is Ausieh," responded the Hadjee, in an uneasy tone.

"Ah!—Ausieh, Mashallah! It is a sweet and pleasant name, and fair is she who bears it. Well does she merit that happiness, which it should be your aim to secure for her. Hark, Hadjee; I have said that I love thee. I swear it is the truth. By your own head, I am your friend. Be but advised by me, and thy house shall flourish. I, Meerza Jemal-u-deen have said it. Look at that maiden—that Ausieh!

* Fairy-faced.

Never was she made to be the wife of a village churl. She is formed for the mistress of a king, and to give birth to princes, as thou with thy wisdom and experience art suited to be the governor of a province at least. Be ruled by me, I say, and it shall be so."

The Hadjee's misgivings, which had kept pace with the Meerza's altered manners and conversation, became now mingled with indignation, for he saw that his guest had some hidden game to play, and sought to blind him and bring him by flattery to his views. But, unwilling to come to open warfare, he restrained his feelings and gave a temperate reply.

"I would beg," said he, "to represent, that your servant has already numbered fourscore years of age. To an old man with one foot already in the grave, what would such honours avail? He seeks but to die in peace, in the obscure station which he has occupied for more than forty years, which he never sought to quit. As for his family, they also are well provided for; Allah forbid that they should ever exchange their humble lot for the honours and the perils of a higher sphere!"

"Allah! Allah! this is wisdom, this is modesty! But, by your soul, Hadjee, you are

in error. It is a crime thus to deprive the King's service of so much wisdom and integrity, and the King's harem of the fairest flower in his empire."

"May the merciful Allah forbid and prevent such a misfortune!" exclaimed the Hadjee, with increasing energy. "Ausieh is already engaged, betrothed; nor can she ever be the wife of any man, but him who already is her husband in the eye of God. And may the curse of Heaven light on all, who would seek to sunder them!"

"Ahi! Baba! what is that to do with the King's commands? *Pooch*—stuff—wind. If he issues his orders, there remains nothing but to obey; you are wise enough to know that, I suppose. But, listen to me, Hadjee. By my own soul, I seek nothing but good to you. Is it not so, Aga?"

"Assuredly. What doubt of that?" squeaked the Eunuch.

"Well then, believe me that your grandchild is a chosen flower for the royal garden, and there is an end of it. You can neither prevent nor retard it. Now only trust to me, and I swear that you shall see her queen of the harem. The first woman in Iraun."

"Let your servant be excused," returned

the Hadjee rising, with more spirit and bitterness, than he had yet evinced. "My beard is too white to be laughed at, although my heart may not be too old to break. Retire, my child, thou hast been here too long; thy grandfather never thought to expose thee, to so much insult." He waved his hand, and Ausieh, who trembled still more violently, sought no further bidding, but lifting the curtain, was out of sight in a moment.

A storm, which had been fast gathering in the already inflamed countenance of the Meerza now burst in thunder.

"How now, old wretch?" he exclaimed, starting from his seat; but the Eunuch seizing hold of him, and whispering a few words in his ear, he resumed his place; his furious accents sunk gradually into silence, as he listened first with much impatience, but soon with more placid attention to the remonstrances of his companion; and at length his aspect cleared, and his ruffled features resumed their mildest expression. "Right, right! You have said well—be it so;" he muttered in reply: then forcing a laugh, he addressed his host who still remained standing and exhibiting much indignant discomposure,

"Well, Hadjee, you are a singular man, it

must be owned ; one would not expect such conduct from a grey beard like yours. You would quarrel with your friends just when they most wish to serve you. But have it your own way ; every one to his taste. One man loves stews and pillaws, another is satisfied with bread and cheese. We shall interfere no further ; and now as we have far to go to-morrow, and have made a good march to-day, we shall retire to rest. May God protect you and send you better thoughts of your friends ! To morrow, Inshallah ! we shall meet again.”

But though the bed clothes of the Meerza were already spread in the Hadjee’s Khelwut, it was not immediately that he stretched his limbs under the silk lahoff, or sought the rest of which he spoke. With the Eunuch he held a long and secret conference, the subject of which appeared to be of poignant interest ; for those who had the curiosity to listen at the passage of the *anderoon* heard the latter warn him more than once to repress his vehemence. At length it terminated ; the Sheikh-ul-Islam took possession of his sumptuous couch, while the Aga betook himself to a scarcely less luxurious one made up on a lower part of the same apartment ; and soon nothing was to be

heard but the loud uneasy breathing of the Meerza oppressed with his intemperate meal.

Morning came, and with it the departure of the unwelcome guests. While preparing to mount his mule, at the stirrup of which stood the venerable Hadjee, the Meerza thanked him in a tone less haughty than usual, for the hospitality he had received, and added a few jocular remarks regarding his ill-founded alarm of the evening before. He assured him that since he was so averse to greatness, it should not be thrust upon him, and that as he had so great a horror of having his child made a queen, a queen she should not be;—there was no cause for alarm.

“ We are neither goul nor jin, my good Hadjee, to eat thy pretty child up alive; and the commendations of a man like me, whose business is to pray and fast, should have nothing to give you dread. *To-Khodah!* man; by the next time we meet, the pretty Ausieh may have her own good man and her flock of little ones, and she has my good wishes that such may be the case—my prayers for her prosperity. But should she, or you, or any of your family want a friend, let them remember Meerza Jemal-u-deen.”

In short, the holy man said so much, and spoke so frankly, that the simple-minded Hadjee began almost to reproach himself for whatever might have been short or churlish in his words or manner during the preceding night; and this very consciousness of injustice, so foreign to his nature, imparted to his reply a degree of good humoured warmth, which he never thought would have marked his parting with the Meerza. The mutual expressions of good will with which they separated were on one side, at least, sincere.

Not such were the feelings of Hoossein, the betrothed of Ausieh. Aware of the sensitive nature of a lover's mind, the Hadjee had refrained from relating to him all that had occurred in the anderoon, on the preceding night; but Ausieh, delighted to find that the danger, or annoyance, at least, which she had suffered was past, with the inconsiderate eagerness of youth informed him of everything.

The detail excited his alarm not less than his indignation. That any man, be his rank or character what it might, should have dared to affront a respectable family, who were his hosts, and above all, one of them being the woman of his affections, was an outrage which he could not forgive; and many a fruitless

execration did he vent against the insolent priest who had committed it, and many a threat as vain, did he fulminate upon his head, should fortune ever enable him to wreck his vengeance upon the proud aggressor.

So far, indeed, was Hoossein from being satisfied with the parting words of the Meerza, that, with the anxious forebodings of a lover, he could not refrain from anticipating some evil result from this unwelcome visit, and he seized the opportunity to press the Hadjee with renewed earnestness to anticipate the day already fixed for his union with Ausieh. But youth and age appeared, on this occasion, to have changed natures.

The old man, relieved from his own apprehensions, lost with them as it seemed, the suspiciousness so common to his time of life, and smiled at the fears of his future son-in-law ; and in reminding him of the cogent reasons which had led them to fix upon the appointed day, acknowledged his extreme unwillingness to make any change in regard to a period which had been pronounced so auspicious by competent authority.

Hoossein, in whom as yet, love retained the mastery of superstition, and who had imbibed all the timidity which the other had

lost, entreated, argued, and remonstrated with an earnestness which merited better success; but the resolutions of age, once formed, are usually firm; the mind is slowly and difficultly moved to change a purpose which it has loved to dwell on; and the impatience of the lover was forced to accommodate itself to the colder calculations of a superstitious prudence, although his fears and his uneasiness remained unlessened and unaltered.

CHAPTER V.

OUTRAGE AND CHASTISEMENT.

THE village gradually recovered from the disastrous effects of its late unwelcome visitation. The losses and expenses summed up and divided among its inhabitants were severe, indeed, upon the community, but not ruinous ; and though heavy groans were heard, and long faces seen for several days, serenity failed not to come at last, and matters returned into their usual channels. Unhappily, this calm was not permitted to continue long. Before three weeks had elapsed, the village was again alarmed by the approach of strangers, whose appearance gave reason for apprehending some fresh exaction. Nor were those who judged so altogether deceived, although it appeared that the blow of which they were to be the instruments, was aimed rather at individuals than at the community at large.

The strangers were ten in number, and as they drew near, it appeared that four of them, at least, were of the military order. These might be the chiefs of the party, for they rode in front and were heavily armed, after the fashion of Gholaums ; two others bore a pacific appearance ; a seventh who had charge of a *yeduc*, or led horse, was probably a *jeloudar* ; and the rest, who rode upon mules laden also with baggage, were obviously menials.

Disregarding the inquisitive and suspicious look of the villagers, or noticing them only with execrations or volleys of contemptuous abuse, and making loud and rude remarks upon all who approached them, they held their way straight on without check or question to the dwelling of Hadjee Khaleel ; where having halted, they sent one of the servants to clamour for admittance, announcing themselves as messengers of the Shah. This dreaded name was sufficient to alarm, as well as to rouse its inmates ; nor was it without a secret misgiving that the Hadjee, who was seated in his *khelwut*, came forth to receive the strangers, who, with the swagger of importance ever assumed by these gentry, clattered boots and all into his public apartment. The discovery that two of them were

eunuchs was little calculated to reassure his mind, for evil was ever to be apprehended when these ministers to the pleasures of the great were made the medium of communication.

Few and insolently familiar were the greetings which the strangers vouchsafed to the old man, as they unceremoniously called for callecoons. Having passed them round, the spokesman, in whom the Hadjee now recognized the same Gholaum who had been the precursor and announcer of the former visitation, addressed him in his customary tone of arrogant self-importance, and, informing him that their business demanded privacy, required that the room might be cleared, in order that he might receive in proper fashion the purport of their message.

With this imperious order the old Zâbit having complied, the Gholaum again took up the discourse, addressing, as might have been expected, his own companions rather than the person principally interested.

“Ai friends,” said he, “what a strange thing is luck; how powerful is destiny! and how vain is it to strive against fortune! Look at this Hadjee, now, who would have imagined, when we were so lately here, at this very village, and so scurvily treated too, that the next time we

should see it would be to shower honour and happiness upon the head of the very man who abused us all so grossly. Ay, by your head, Hadjee, we have not forgotten how you threatened me, and how well disposed your rascals were to make good your threats, had they been able; yet such, Agas, I say, is destiny, that I, even I, Shumsheer Beg Gholaum, am the man to whose part it falls to announce your good fortune and exaltation! But, by the King's salt, thou shalt give me a mujdeh! ay, and such a one as may be worth my trouble too. In the meantime, listen: hearken to thy good fortune from the lips of Aga Ayoob himself, for to him, rather than me, doth this part of the duty properly belong."

The Aga, a tall, thin, withered creature, with a yellow wrinkled countenance and an eye which twinkled with a demure malicious light, took up the echo of the Gholaum's speech.

"Ay, verily," uttered he in a shrill cracked voice, "Shumsheer Beg has said the truth, and the head of Hadjee Khaleel is about to be exalted. The smile of royalty has cast its sunshine upon him, and his felicity *Alhumdulillah!* is complete! Give ear, Oh Hadjee, to the tidings which I bring. Know, that the greatness of thy worth hath not been concealed, but

that, from the lowly abodes of Ameenabâd, it hath reached even to the *Daur-ul-Sultunut* itself, to the august threshold of the royal dwelling, and has not been withheld from the ear of the King of kings. The King of kings himself hath signified the royal desire that honour and favour shall be heaped upon the worthy Hadjee Khaleel to an extraordinary degree.

“Behold! the gardens of the august Harem are gay with a thousand flowers, and the whole earth cannot match the perfume or the bloom of the roses that blow there. Yet the flowers of the desert are also sweet and fair, and there blooms, it is said, in the wilderness of Ameenabâd, a bud of rare promise; and such is the condescension of the father of his people, that this lowly bud will henceforth be permitted to blossom among the more splendid beauties of that earthly paradise. In a word, O Hadjee, the centre of the universe hath heard of the beauty of thy grandchild, and hath resolved to honour her with his royal favour; and, behold, he has deputed us, his faithful servants, Aga Ayoob and Aga Bahraum, attended by this his confidential Gholam, to conduct the fortunate fair one to the footstool of the king of kings. Arise, therefore, O

Hadjee, and prepare, with gratitude, to obey the royal command."

Heart-struck and confounded, the unhappy Hadjee was not prepared at the moment to reply to his insolent guests, who saw and enjoyed his distress. From the first commencement of the Gholaum's address, which was delivered in that lofty tone of solemn mockery so well understood by the retainers of the great, the old man's heart misgave him; and he listened with increasing uneasiness to the hollow and treacherous professions of favour and regard which fell from the eunuch's mouth, until, at length, he touched upon the nature of that favour, and named the royal harem.

Then, indeed, was the secret dread, which, in spite of his wilful blindness, had weighed upon the old man's soul, changed into horrid and palpable certainty; and the groan of anguish, which escaped his lips, furnished matter of sport to the fiends who tortured him.

But though old and feeble, the Hadjee was not of a character to allow himself to be trampled on by his insulters, without resistance. The cool insolence of the Aga, as he proceeded further to descant upon the young maiden's rare good fortune, roused the old man's spirit;

and, by the time that official thought fit to conclude his harangue, he had recovered his self-possession, and was ready to reply.

“To the mandates of my sovereign, Aga,” said he, “by whomsoever conveyed, his servant is at all times ready to yield obedience, however distressing their import. To the Shah, no doubt, belongs all that we possess, and our lives are in his hand. Nevertheless, we are also the children of Allah, and are not less sustained by the power of *His* Almighty arm, than the King himself. In that arm we put our trust. To Him, even kings are accountable. When this humble roof was lately exalted by the presence of the worthy Sheik-ul-Islam, Meerza-Jemal-u-deen, a similar proposition was hinted at, by that revered person; and at that time, his servant openly stated, that the maiden was already the contracted wife of another. This I again confirm; and thus the honour proposed to be conferred upon her, by the king of kings, it is out of her power to receive; and we, his Ryots, confiding in the royal clemency, doubt not of receiving his Majesty’s forgiveness. Such is the representation which your servant has to request you will lay before the royal footstool. In the meantime, Agas, ye are my guests; be pleased

to refresh yourselves, and tarry here as long as ye may find it convenient; and when ye seek to return, we are ready to supply what may be required for your comfort on the journey."

"Allah, Allah! What news is this?" exclaimed the Eunuch, repressing, with some difficulty, the growl of the Gholaum, which was about to burst forth with his usual outrageous violence; and which, in despite of all control, still muttered its sullen accompaniment to the shrill tenor of the other. "Who ever heard of such folly? Hast thou become mad, old man? Has thy judgment utterly forsaken thee, that thou dreamst of returning such a reply to the commands of the Shah-in-Shah? — of refusing immediate compliance with the slightest wish of the protector of the world? Dost thou not know, O man! that this is rebellion? that, for far less than this, thy old neck might incontinently be brought in contact with the edge of a scymitar? *Penah-bur-khodah!* many a man hath lost eyes and tongue, ay, and every nail from his ten toes, for less than half of the abomination thou hast uttered, within these five minutes? But come; there is no harm done yet: it is well for thee that thou hast to deal with Mussulmauns that have bowels; we are good souls,

and know how to shut our ears when it is not convenient to hear too sharply. Upon reflection, thou wilt speak more wisely; that which is written, must be. It is inscribed on the forehead of the fair Ausieh, that she must bask in the sunshine of royal favour. So come, old man, say *Bismillah*, arise, and issue the necessary orders."

"By the King's head, he had best do so, and speedily too," growled the Gholaum. "Let there be no delay, or the old rebel may find that I, Shumsheer Beg, have not come all the way to Ameenabâd to hear an old dotard mumble treason. Let us see; in two hours more, our horses will be rested and fed; by that time, let the maiden be ready, or he shall see how we will burn his father!"

"Agas," said the Hadjee, "I have but one reply to give on this matter; my grandchild is disposed of; she is no longer mine to bestow: and sooner than assume a right over her, which I have not, in order to force her to the fate you would doom her to, I would suffer her to be stabbed in these old arms, when they can no longer protect her. What need is there of more words? Comply with your demands, I cannot; and I am ready to abide the consequences of refusal."

“By the Shah’s head, is it so?” roared the Gholaum. “Then, Bismillah, you shall have them! Hoh, hoh! Pidersug! there is but one course to take. You hear what the old scoundrel says, brothers? Good: and you know your duty. Let him see whether the Shah’s commands are bubbles to be played with by every old idiot.”

“Oh! but wait; patience awhile, Shumsheer Beg,” said the Eunuch, affecting a coaxing tone. “The Hadjee will come to hear reason. What? we must not take account of what is said by the wretch under the bastinado, nor deal with the Moollah and the madman by the same rule! The Hadjee loves his grandchild; he delights in her company; well, there is no harm in that—it is natural. The maiden’s destiny calls her from him: he is distressed, and forgets, in his distress, both his duty, and the high honour that awaits her—the advantage to himself and the family; for, be assured, Hadjee, that riches, as well as honour, will be bestowed upon thee. So listen to reason, man, do; reflect, reconcile thyself to what cannot be avoided.”

“Agas, what Allah has decreed, no doubt will come to pass; but who can read the book of Providence? It cannot be the will of

Allah, praise be to his name, that injustice should be committed ; nor will I lend myself to be the instrument of tyranny. Agas, I know not to whose agency I am indebted for this ill turn ; but some of you, in spite of what the Gholaum has said, were hospitably received here ; and Meerza Jemal-u-deen, not only acknowledged my poor efforts to accommodate him, but promised, should occasion hereafter present itself, to interest himself in my favour. Surely, it is impossible that *he* can know of this purposed violence ?”

A glance of dubious meaning was exchanged between the Eunuch and the Gholauums, as one of the latter, who had not hitherto spoken, took up the discourse. “Of that, Hadjee, we can know nothing ; we are but servants—servants of the Shah, and have a duty to perform which must be done, if possible, by quiet and peaceful means, if not, by force, and you will do well to avoid the consequences of compelling us to have recourse to violence.”

“Ay, by the King’s salt ! and by force it shall be done, if this old ass does not cry *cabool* !* before he is three minutes older. What ? are we to sit here like tame fools, and let an old *fuzool* bedaub our beards with dirt

* I consent.

at his pleasure? By the soul of my father, I, Shumsheer Beg will not, for one! Come, brethren—no further parley. What say you, Aga?"

"Patience, patience, man; the Hadjee is going to speak."

"Yes, Agas, I have a few words more to say. I beg to represent that I am an old, and but a poor man, as ye see. Little means have I of satisfying persons of your consequence; but what I can offer to content you, I will. May God grant me success!"

"Come. Bismillah! the man begins at last to speak something like sense," said the Gholaum. "Barikillah!—go on."

"Ay, I knew it," said the Aga. "I told you the Hadjee would sooner or later come to reason. Proceed, in the name of Allah!"

"Well, Agas, what is there that a man will not do to save his life, and what were my poor remains of life to me without my child? Now, heavily as your last visitation fell upon me, I have still remaining a small matter; and if ye will consent to forego the violence which you purpose, and leave my child and myself in peace and security, I will make up a sum of forty tomauns in gold, which, with certain stuffs of silk, and cloth, and muslin, worth but

little less, I will tender as a return for your forbearance."

Once more did the Aga and the Gholaum interchange significant looks; but the former shook his head and was about to speak, when the Gholaum interfered in his turn, and after a few words to his companion took up the discourse :

"Did I did not tell you, Agas, that the Hadjee had begun to open his eyes? Aha! let Shumsheer Beg alone for quickening men's sight and hearing. Lo! the man speaks intelligibly now. Listen to me, friend, produce thy coin, bring hither thy stuff, let us see thy offering; who can tell but the very sight of thy gold may go far in bringing this business to an adjustment?"

With an alacrity, the offspring of reviving hope, which few of his countrymen would have felt on the question of surrendering so large a sum, the Hadjee rose and quitted the room, leaving his uncourteous guests in earnest discourse together. At first, there might have been seen some appearance of altercation between the principals, namely, the eunuch called Aga Ayoob, and Shumsheer Beg Gholaum; but after the interchange of a few sentences it appeared to subside. A sardonic smile on the

wrinkled visage of the former, was replied to by a burst of savage merriment from the latter, and the party talked of indifferent matters for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, when the Hadjee returned bearing in his hands a bag, followed by several servants carrying trays of cloth and goods.

“ Behold, Agas, the last hard-earned property of a poor and aged man; but he willingly sacrifices it, to secure the safety of his child. In this bag is the gold; here are the goods, some of them, at least, and the rest shall be forthcoming to-morrow, if one of you shall please to wait and receive them. Now, let me trust ye are content; relieve, then, an old man’s heart, and earn a right to his prayers.”

“ Good, very good, friend Hadjee, but—let me see the gold; Aga, and you, Eussuff, will you examine the goods. Ay, all right, I see; here are the forty tomauns—so far, so well. Now, old man, I told thee that thou owedst me the *Mujdeh* for our news; and here, thanks to my luck, rather than to thy good-will, behold it. Why, thou old jackass, what didst thou take us for? If thou soughtest to do thy pleasure with our beards, didst thou not think it worth

while inquiring whether we had eyes, hands or brains? If thou art so fond of filth thyself, didst thou think us bound to eat thy abomination? Open your eyes, and learn that we, at least, are not yaboos; and now, in one word, art thou ready to produce the maiden?"

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed the old man. "And wilt thou do thus? Art thou, in truth, such a villain! Nay, nay, it is impossible—thou dost but jest! But think, my good Agas, how little time a man, past eighty years, can afford for jesting. His days, whether for evil or for good, must be but few; in the name of Allah, then, set his heart at rest."

"Away, old fool;—produce the maiden."

"Aga, Aga, thou hast more compassion—is it not so? Wilt thou not hear and help a miserable old man?"

"Hadjee, I am but a servant. I can do nothing. I dare not disobey my master's will."

"In the name of the most just and merciful Creator! Men of blood and rapine, I call on you to listen to my prayer!"

A loud and savage laugh was the reply.

"Produce the girl, thou old dotard, or thy withered carcass shall pay for the delay," thun-

dered the Gholaum, as rising, he advanced towards the Hadjee ; the rest following his example.

“ Then, Bismillah ! Savage men, if ye will break the laws of God and man, be the consequences on your own heads ! Seek the victim yourselves ; behold the way ;” and the Eunuchs, followed by the Gholaums, advanced towards the passage that led to the anderoon. The *khelwut* alone lay between them and the forbidden place ; but as the foremost of the party raised the purdeh, which hung at its entrance, they started back on seeing it filled with armed men.

“ Allah-il-ullah ! Treachery !” shouted the Gholaum ; “ but thou, hoary villain, thou shalt pay for it !” and rushing back through the passage to the public apartment, he seized the old Hadjee by the beard, while his right hand griped the dagger in his girdle. But it never left the sheath ; before an eye could twinkle, the ruffian fell, levelled to the earth by the blow of a heavy club, and ere many seconds had elapsed, the strokes of the furious villagers, who had rushed into and now filled the court, had reduced him almost to a shapeless mass.

The other Gholaums, surprised and off their

guard, never dreaming of resistance, could scarce draw sword or pistol before they were knocked down; and all would have shared the fate of the leader, had not the Hadjee and Hoossein, who now rushed forward from the *khelwut*, exerted themselves to prevent more mischief.

In spite of their efforts, another of the Gholaums was killed, and the elder of the Eunuchs rendered insensible by a blow; the promptness of Hoossein, by intercepting the thrust of a *khunjer*, barely succeeded in saving a third Gholaum, a young man of less forbidding manners than the rest, who was just about to share the fate of his companions, in spite of the "Amaun, amaun!" which he earnestly ejaculated to the enraged Caussim, whose knee was upon his breast.

The fray was soon at an end, and silence succeeded to the burst of cries and execrations, as the combatants, ceasing from their work, stood glaring on each other with inflamed countenances. In a few minutes more, the survivors of those who had so lately poured forth their unfeeling arrogance, stood bound as prisoners before the object of their insults, while the Hadjee, who, with the principal villagers, seated themselves upon the very numuds, so

lately occupied by their insulters, in a calm, collected voice, addressed them, as follows:—

“ May the merciful Allah forgive you, strangers, for the evil which ye have this day caused. Ye came hither in the semblance of peace, but violence and outrage were in your hearts. Ye represented yourselves as messengers from our sovereign, but your errand was one of tyranny and insult. Ye received a temperate reply—a reply, which, were your message a genuine one, if properly represented to the King of kings, would, doubtless, have been received with gracious consideration; but ye rejected it with taunt and abuse. A conciliatory offer of negociation was made: for what, but gifts and entreaty have the weak to offer to the strong? Ye feigned acceptance, but deceit was in your hearts, and force in your intentions. Behold the result. The worm will turn if trampled on. Did ye imagine that the people of this village, descended, as they are, from the brave tribes of these mountains were to kiss the feet of their insulters; to see outrage offered to their women and their elders, and make no effort to protect them? Your eyes are now opened, and ye may tell the manner in which your violence has been repelled. The Shah, if it be his will, may indeed destroy this village,

and may drive its inhabitants, for shelter, to the mountains; he may transform industrious Ryots into houseless, reckless robbers; but he will find, that these Ryots prefer even such an alternative to a repetition of the insults and outrages ye have sought to heap upon us. But we do not believe ye have the King's authority to act thus, nor do we dread that the blood now shed shall be visited on our heads. The events of this day shall be duly represented at the foot of the throne, together with the causes that led to them; and even you, if ye can feel gratitude for life preserved, must bear testimony to the forbearance and long-suffering patience of the Ryots of Ameenabâd.

“And now, prepare to depart—you are safe and free. When refreshed with food and rest, a guard shall attend you beyond the lands of the village. As for these unfortunate men who have fallen victims to their own overbearing violence, carry their remains along with you from the place, if such be your choice; if not, the necessary rites shall be performed, even here; to the dead what matters it who may dig his grave?”

Sullen and dejected, the Gholams made no reply; but, after receiving the food prepared for them, in silence, they departed, bearing

with them the insensible, but still animate body of the Eunuch ; the bodies of the two Gholaulms they left to be disposed of in the skirts of the village burying-ground, where the influence of the Zâbit procured them a decent interment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSULTATION.

IN the evening after this painful and alarming occurrence, the greater part of the inhabitants, thoughtless and inconsiderate, returned to their customary occupations or amusements, as if nothing of consequence had taken place to disturb the tranquillity of the village. But not thus, with minds at ease, did the Hadjee and elders meet to review the events of the day, and consider both the consequences and best mode of averting them.

To the most obtuse and unreflecting, it was obvious, that, by the mere act of resistance to the Shah's commands, conveyed to them by his Gholaums and confidential eunuchs, supposing the message to be genuine, they had incurred a fearful penalty; but how greatly

must their guilt be held enhanced, by the murder of some, and the violence offered to all of these royal messengers. What, indeed, less than ruin and extermination had they to apprehend, under such circumstances; and what means could they adopt to protect themselves from the threatening storm!

The resistance, it was true, had been called forth by no ordinary outrage, nor could it be regarded in the light of a mere private wrong; for though the guilt had been incurred in defence of their chief and his family, it was a case which might, at any time, become that of each individual among them. It was like turning out to repel a party of plunderers, or to defend the property of the community.

The discussion which took place was long and anxious, for each particular of their own situation required to be weighed; their power of eluding the arm of authority in case of need; and the degree of suffering to which they must make up their minds in case of being forced to abandon their houses, and fly from violence; and though all were equally interested in the measures to be taken, the varying nature of individual interests created a corresponding difference of opinion.

“For my part,” said Baba Abdoolla, a man past the middle age, who had several young and good looking daughters, with but small property and an indifferent house, “it appears to me, that nothing short of ruin and destruction is to be anticipated; and if we remain in the village, we may look to having our throats cut, our houses burned over our heads, and our wives and daughters carried off as slaves. Why, then, should we place ourselves in the wolf’s mouth, when a day’s journey will carry us in safety to a friendly country, where our lives and goods will be safe?”

“Barikillah ! very true, indeed !” responded Jaffer Allee, a man whose principal property being in sheep and goats, which could pasture any where, regarded, without alarm, a removal to the upper lands. “By all means let us move at once, carry off our property, and betake ourselves to the Heft-Derreh, and the mountains of Feridoon, where Kereem Beg will protect us, and we may live in security and ease.”

“Indeed? Is that your opinion, comrade?” interposed Ismael Coossa, a sober cultivator of the ground, and the possessor of a prolific orchard. “Precious security you would find in

Kereem Beg's country ; a plundering ruffian, whose horsemen drive the country from Khonsâr to the Koh-i-zurd, in spite of Kelb Allee Khan ; a true Buchtiaree robber, of the same stock as Roostum Beg, whose gripe ye already have often felt. Between these two wolves, we should truly be much at our ease !”

“And knowest thou not there is blood between Roostum and Kereem, man ?” replied Baba Abdoolla ; “the one would protect us, were it but to spite the other.”

“What nonsense are you speaking ?” growled another of the villagers, who had himself been a sufferer from the mountain marauders. “What are their blood feuds to us ? Wolves you have called them, and wolves they are, and what chance has the lamb between them ? They may snarl at each other, but they will both turn and suck our blood ; at best it would be but saving our flesh at the cost of our skin.”

“But how come we all to have forgotten Kaleb Allee Khan ? Is not he, after all, our natural protector ? Will he suffer a Buchtiaree village to be destroyed while he sits at Khonsâr, and claims a right to stand in the Shah's presence ?”

“Kaleb Allee Khan did you say, comrade? —*Pooch*—stuff,” said a withered little man, who had frequently travelled to the capital in his former capacity of muleteer, and who had a shrewd comprehension how matters stood both at court and in his own province. “I will state in your service, brethren, that Kaleb Allee Khan has quite enough to do to maintain his own influence at court, among all these moollahs and eunuchs. Were there fighting to be done, Kaleb Allee might be worth something; for by holding out a prospect of plunder, he could get together a brave band of these wild Buchtiarees; but where it is a question of influence with the Shah, it is quite a different matter. When most of the nobles are busy with intrigues against one another, or are retiring to their homes to strengthen themselves against coming evil, think ye that the Khan would waste his power at the *durk-haneh* in clamouring for justice to a few poor Ryots. Allah! Allah! No—”

“Allee *Cherwadar** is right, friends,” said Kerbelai Hussun. “Buchtiarees though you may call yourselves, and are indeed, the Khan

* Muleteer.

will not send a horseman or a *toffunchee* to your aid ; far less will he interfere in any way with the Shah's business or servants. And truth to say, he gets nothing from us to make it worth his while to run the smallest risk for our sakes. No ; the choice, it appears to me, lies between remaining here, summoning some stout Buchtiaree lads to aid us, paying them for their services, thus braving the storm, if it come, and retreating only when compelled to do so ; or, at once abandoning our homes, and carrying our families and property into a place of greater safety, among the mountains. Now, my opinion is, I confess, against this last alternative. For, first, how many chances are there against the Shah's taking any further notice of the matter, even if he is made aware of what has happened ; and again how are we to be certain that his Majesty has anything to do with the business ? But how stands the case ? The Shah, or the ministers of his pleasures, hearing that at Ameenabâd there is a beautiful virgin, send a party to bring her to the presence. Resistance to the royal will is not anticipated ; the party is weak and is driven off, so the Shah or his eunuchs are disappointed. What then ? After all, the business is but a trifle.

The Shah has his attention occupied by greater objects; his troops are otherwise employed, his ministers are taken up with their intrigues—who, then, is to care about the fate of a Gholam or an eunuch? Our village too is so remote that, Inshallah! the whole affair may blow over with scarce a bluster. Should the worst happen, and an attempt be made upon our village, we may still purchase it off, or resist, as matters may turn out. If we fail in either way, we can but fly at last.

“On the other hand, should we retreat at once, what do we not risk? The loss, in case of attack, of the whole village—of our pleasant homes which will be utterly destroyed. The wolf and the jackall will have their dens upon our hearths; our fields and our gardens will be laid waste; we shall never again sit and smoke our pipes under our own old trees, or drink the water of our pleasant streams. All that, at the worst, may by violence be wrested from us, we should thus voluntarily abandon; nor should we profit ourselves a whit by the sacrifice. My opinion is, therefore, for remaining in the place, and adopting such measures as may best be devised for our future security.”

“ Undoubtedly there is truth and wisdom, in the words of Kerbelai Hussun,” said a venerable looking old man, who had several children, with their families, settled in the village ; “ and even should we resolve on quitting our homes, where shall we seek for the security we want? For my own part, Buchtiaree as I am, and many as there are among the Eeliauts of my own blood, on whose skirts I might well lay hold, God knows that in such circumstances as ours, I should have many scruples in applying for such protection. Let those who can speak, as many here are able to do, declare the truth ; should we go as helpless fugitives with our wives and household stuff in one hand, and our staves in the other, driving our flocks and herds before us, who will insure us the *Koosh-Amedeed*, or the *Seffaguelden*?* and even if shame were to cause our being received, should we wish to return, as no doubt we shall do, when the storm blows past, who will say that we shall bring back all our property? or tell us by what account these Eeliauts will reckon with us, for maintenance, and protection, and pasture, and charges, and dues? Then again, fellow countrymen, here

* Welcome.

are we, good comfortable villagers, accustomed to live in warm houses, eating bread of sound wholesome grain, with our oil and butter, and meat, and dried fruits to season it; we have our gardens, and our cultivation, our cotton, ay, and our silk, just as those of the towns, all in addition to the milk and the cheese, and the flesh of our flocks and herds, like the Eeliauts. We are well clothed and well fed, and each night as we lie down to rest, we know that, by the blessing of Allah, we shall rise next morning to plenty and comfort.

“ Now think what a change we must submit to, should we resolve to abandon our village? We must be content to dwell in tents, like the Eeliauts, or like robbers in caves among the mountains; for where are the villages of the Heft-Derreh, or they eilâks of Feridoon? As for bread, or corn, or oil, or fruits, Penah-bur-khodah! we must not even dream of them. We must eat our own flocks and herds, or starve; for how long should we be able to buy ourselves food? and every one knows what Buchtiaree hospitality amounts to. No doubt, should we be driven to extremities, our families might support such a life for a while, till the storm passes over; but to encounter it,

unnecessarily, would be like throwing away our *poosteen*,* and exposing ourselves to the cold, because a thief might come to rob us of it, and knock us on the head, to get hold of it."

"Ay, Baba Allee, you are old, and all change is painful to the aged; but to most of us the things you dread, and speak of as so terrible would be less evils than the risk of having our throats cut by the Shah's commands."

Thus spoke a person, who having a dispute with a relative about the possession of a house and garden, in which he was almost certain to be worsted, felt his local attachments somewhat enfeebled.

"It is my opinion, friends," he continued, "that the Shah will assuredly take vengeance upon the village, and that very speedily too; so that the sooner we get to *Bust* (sanctuary), the better for ourselves. Do you imagine that these fellows, these Gholaulms, whose faces are blackened by what we have done to day, will sit down like lambs, or asses under their maltreatment? Will they not rather exaggerate our riches and our contumacy, in order to excite the anger of their superiors, and

* Sheepskin cloak.

the avarice of their companions, and thus receive revenge for themselves? Rely upon it, the time will soon come, when you may wish you were safe among the Buchtiaree mountains, however dubious the welcome, or small the comfort, you may expect to find there."

The Hadjee, who had listened with great patience and attention to the various conflicting opinions of the assembly, now took up the discourse, and as he prepared himself to speak, the clamour which had risen to a great height sunk at once into a becoming silence. One cry of "the Hadjee, hear the Hadjee," rose for a moment, and then all paused to listen.

"My friends and brethren," said he, "I have desired to hear your opinions before delivering my own; because in a case so difficult and important, I felt anxious to be assisted by the judgment of all. Willing as I am to avoid all unnecessary exposure, I would not underrate the danger in which we stand; and though I do not, like Baba Abdoollah and others, regard immediate attack and ruin as certain, I cannot with my friend, the Kerbelai, consider the peril as so imaginary, or so remote and uncertain, as to be safely set at defiance.

"I am quite aware, as well as Baba Allee, of the dubious hospitality of the Eeliauts, and

agree with Ismael Coussa, in questioning the nature of the protection they might afford us, in the event of our claiming it under circumstances of urgent necessity. Here, removed from immediate contact, independent, and able occasionally to do them a good office, we agree well with the Buchtiarees. They respect us, because we can aid them, and defend ourselves; and, in return, they, no doubt, do afford us that countenance and assistance which help to keep our enemies at bay, while we purchase, on fitting terms, the convenience of using their pastures. Ours is an alliance reciprocally and equally beneficial, while each party maintains its respective position. But let that position be altered; let either become suitor to the other, and the balance is destroyed, the system at an end. In that case we should find our generous allies transformed into exacting tyrants, and ourselves into powerless slaves. Let us, for a moment, suppose the case reversed. Should we, *could* we with prudence admit to the free use of our village and lands, a whole Eeliaut *Ooloos*, driven from its lands by displeasure of its chief, or the sword of some powerful neighbour? Should we not, in such circumstances, be apt to insist on hard terms, ay, and solid payment for our aid?

“To me, therefore, it appears that a retreat to *Heft Derreh*, is at present inexpedient; and that it may be avoided entirely, I trust is not less probable. For, in the first place, as the Kerbelai observes, we have no certainty that the event, which has so much discomposed us, has, in truth, originated with the Shah himself: and then if it has been but the act of some inferior minister aiming at gratifying his master, there may be room, considering our remote situation, to hope that we shall hear no more about it. If, on the other hand, the ministers of vengeance should arrive, every one knows how much these Agas are open to negociation. Let every measure be taken to prepare for their arrival, and the result, *Inshallah* ! will probably be fortunate. Should we fail, the mountains are still behind us, and will, to the last, be ready to receive us, when it is necessary to fly.

“But, while thus preparing for the storm, let us not neglect the means of averting it entirely. I propose that the wrath of the Shah be deprecated, and his mercy supplicated by humble petitions; his ear instructed by forcible representations, and his good-will propitiated by such presents as we have to offer. Let us make up an offering of the produce of our country, such as may be likeliest to prove acceptable

to his majesty. Let money be provided ; for who shall enter the courts of kings without a charm to conciliate the porters ? The ministers must be suitably approached ; the officers in attendance must have their fee. In short, a purse must be made up ; and the money already proffered to these villanous Gholaulms may form a part of it. If access can be won to his majesty, no doubt he will lend us a favourable ear ; for, although a king of Iraun, his soul inclines to mercy, and his heart to kindness ; nor, though powerful, as a consuming fire, does he lightly consent to dip his hands in blood.”

The Hadjee paused ; and the whole assembly burst forth into a torrent of applause.

“ *Barikillah ! Belli ! Belli !* excellent ! The Hadjee has spoken the truth. Prosperity to his house ! He *is* a Zâbit, *mashallah !* a truly wise and worthy elder ! Locman himself could not have spoken better ! But who are to be the deputies ? who are to carry the petition and the presents ? *Hameen mushkil-ust !* that is the difficulty ! By the head of the Hadjee, no simple matter is it to go into the presence of these blood-drinkers of the court, with a sword round your neck, or before the hard-hearted Moollahs and *Mooshteheds* of Ispahan, with an *Arzee* in

your hand !” and a murmuring and mumbling of alarm, and a shaking of heads and beards, succeeded the first burst of acclamation.

“Comrades,” replied the Hadjee, “when the head is in the lion’s mouth, the question is not whether the beast can crush it, but how best to draw it out in safety. No doubt there is danger in approaching royalty ; but there may sometimes be more in keeping away. We have incurred the risk, and have now only to think how to get best out of the scrape. Were your servant but ten years younger, you should not have wanted a messenger ; but neither are his powers equal to the task, nor would your interests be promoted by his undertaking it. He is more useful as a counsellor than as an instrument, and the younger and more active must take his place. I, therefore, would propose that six heads of families, headed by the Kerbelai and the Mushedee, be empowered by us as bearers of our presents and petition to the foot of the throne.”

“Good ! good ! excellent ! an admirable choice ! could not be better said ! Bismillah ! the Kerbelai and the Mushedee !” exclaimed several voices, the owners feeling infinitely relieved at having, as they hoped, got out of the difficulty.

“No ! no ! no ! Tovah ! tova ! pardon us ! We indeed ! Who are we, that we should undertake such an office ? By your heads, no ; we are nothing — nobody !” exclaimed both these worthies in the same breath. “It is impossible—*Wullah !* It is out of the question. We cannot quit our families or the village.”

“La-illah-il-ullah ! What words are these, *Humsheherees* ?—Not go ?—not fit ? Why, who should go then ? Who should be so fit for such a duty as our Ketkhodah and our Mushedee ? By your heads, souls, eyes, you must go ;” and fifty voices all spoke together, so that no one could be heard.

“My children,” said the Hadjee, at length, “have patience. No doubt our worthy fellow villagers will do us this service, when they shall have duly reflected on the matter. Let them consider that this will not be their first trip to the capital. They have often visited that great city on their own business, they will surely go thither once more on that of their friends and brethren. After all, where is the danger ! There is greater risk in remaining here, with the chance, according to Jaffer Allee, of having our throats cut by these blood-thirsty Gholaums, or of being forced away from the village to suffer all sorts of hardships, according

to your own words, Kerbelai. Nor will the duty be altogether profitless ; we cannot require them to undertake a troublesome and fatiguing office without remuneration. . Let them but proceed discreetly, and feel their way with caution, and on my head be the result !”

“ I beg to state,” said Hoossein, now modestly stepping forward, “ that I have here got something which but lately came into my hands, and which possibly may be useful in this affair ;” with these words he produced the ring which he had received from the young hunter he had met in the mountains, bringing to their remembrance, at the same time, the circumstance which had placed it in his possession.

“ Allah ! Allah ! this may, indeed, be useful,” said the Hadjee. “ My son thou must accompany the deputation, as bearer of this signet ; who knows but that it may be the means of crowning our efforts with complete success.”

“ My father shall have the ring, venerable Hadjee ; for myself it were needless to attend, I am too young, too inexperienced to be of any use with them ; and, in case of danger, I may be needed at the village.”

“ Be content, my son,” replied the Hadjee ; “ it was thou that didst receive the signet ; in

thy hands alone can it retain its virtue. Leave the village to the protection of Allah and thy companions; thou wilt do us more good at present by thy absence than thy presence."

"The Hadjee has decided well," said the Kerbelai, who by this time had cast over the matter in his mind, and discovered that he not only might indemnify himself for the fatigue and hazard of his journey, but might make it a handsome trading expedition, and had therefore resolved to accept the proffered office. "My son must undoubtedly accompany us; the ring in other hands than those which received it might be the cause of harm, instead of good. Bismillah Mushedee, is thy mind made up? For me I am ready."

The Mushedee, through whose calculating brain some similar process of reasoning had been obscurely making its way, now likewise intimated his assent, and demanded to be informed of whom the rest of their party was to consist; and, though it was a distinction which no one would have coveted, yet the chiefs having consented, no one had any decent excuse for holding off. Accordingly the whole affair of the mission was now regularly arranged, and on the succeeding day, the six elders, together with Hoosseïn, having completed

their preparations, and received charge of the presents and common purse, apparelled in the most decent garb the village wardrobes could turn out, and mounted on mules, yaboos, or asses, according to the respective means of the parties, proceeded down the glen towards the high road leading to Ispahan.

CHAPTER VII.

ISPAHAN. EVENING GOSSIP.

THE third day was already far spent, when, emerging from the hills and broken ground that skirted an immense plain, the eyes of the villagers were greeted by a view of the tall minarets, the shining domes, and gilded pinnacles of Ispahan, rising high in the dusty air, above the dull sea of mud-built houses, and the boundless expanse of gardens, and orchards with which they were surrounded. But evening had already fallen ere the humble train of deputies, having threaded their way among numberless inclosures, jostled by large cavalcades which moved on with imposing state, or almost overrun by the gay gallants who spurred their splendidly caparisoned chargers hither and thither, covered with the dust raised by caravans and trains of loaded mules, camels, and other beasts of burthen, and lost among the gradually thickening crowd, which filled

every avenue to this immense capital, at length entered the *Der-Tokchee*,* and passing unquestioned amidst the living stream, were sucked with it into the channel of one of those seemingly interminable bazaars, that traverse the city from side to side, filled with the concentrated riches, and as it seemed with half the congregated multitudes of the east.

It was, in fact, the hour when the mass of that dense population, which still in these days filled this enormous metropolis, having quitted their labours and occupations for the day, went forth to make their purchases for the night's meal, and early morning wants, or to seek for amusements in the variety of objects abroad ; and the lights which glittered in abundance from the booths and shops of the bazaars, gave to view a crowded and most motley assemblage, to which the dust and dimness of the atmosphere lent a mystery yet more imposing. The caps, turbans, helmets, scarfs, shawls, cloaks, coats, and splendid *Barounies* of the rich, the noble and the military, shone or glanced in all variety of colours, intermingled with the sober costume of the Moollahs, or the dull grey felt of the peasantry. Charger and yaboo

* One of the gates of the city.

mingled together. The Arab, the Toorkoman, and Koordish steeds of the courtly cavaliers jostled with the mules and asses of the *Cherwadars* and peasantry, or shied and kicked at the long necked camels, which laden with the produce of many lands came crowding in from Khorassân, from Yezd, or from Kermân.

Nor were the noises less multifarious or bewildering than the objects which greeted the view of the strangers. The roaring of grooms, or lantern bearers, and furoshes, as each respectively essayed to clear the way for his master, with their *Rah-bedeh ! Serhissab ! Serhissab !* the loud complaints of the foot-passengers unceremoniously shoved or driven by blows to either side ; the screaming to mules and yaboos, by those who drove them ; the execrations of muleteers and sarwans ;* the shouts of persons who roared in vain for attention ; the cries of venders of goods, the chatter of shopkeepers and their customers ; the howls and horns of dervishes, and the multitudinous uproar of every description that rises from a closely pent crowd, were mingled in one general din, from which, ever and anon, broke bursts of deeper or shriller tone, in a medley wild

* Camel drivers.

enough to distract the ear of all but those to whom long custom had rendered it familiar.

To the leaders of the deputation, the scene was by no means new. Of the others, one or two might have witnessed something of the sort, upon a very reduced scale at Khonsâr or Gilpaigaun; yet even to them, long retired from the bustle of a city, the roar was perplexing. But to those who now for the first time learned that such things existed, the effect was utterly confounding; and the poor rustics stared about them like creatures dropped from another sphere, as their beasts less startled than their masters bore them on through the crowd.

To Hoosseïn as to the rest it was amazing; for far, indeed, did it transcend in grandeur and magnificence, as well as in extent, all his preconceived ideas of this vast metropolis; yet his residence at Booroojird, though but a village in comparison with the capital of the empire, had in some degree schooled him for entering the great world; and to him, therefore, it was exciting, spirit-stirring in the highest degree, without being so confounding as it was to the rest. It seemed as if his soul had now, for the first time, found its congenial element—a region with which it would speedily become

familiar ; and as they slowly progressed towards their resting place for the night, he exulted in the bustle and the multitudes, that swelled and eddied round him like the waves of a stormy sea.

They halted at a caravanserai, which in times of yore had been wont to shelter the person and the wares of the worthy Mushedee. And although the keeper, who in these days had ministered to the wants of travellers, had been gathered to his fathers, a trifling display of coin soon put the deputies of Ameenabâd in possession of a comfortable *outaugh*, or chamber in this receptacle of wayfaring men.

Having duly attended to the welfare of their beasts, and satisfied the cravings of their own appetites, by means of a plentiful meal from a cookshop hard by, they followed the example of other travellers, who occupied the neighbouring chambers, and who, having spread their carpets on the raised terrace before their doors, smoked their calleons in the open air, by the light of a beautiful moon.

They had not long occupied this seat, when their attention was attracted by the conversation of a party on their right ; merchants, they appeared to be, and travellers, who were engaged in the eager discussion of some subject of interest ; and it soon became apparent that it

had reference to some recent disaster, and to the general condition of the kingdom and affairs at court.

“It is true; by your head it is the case,” said one of them, very earnestly, as if supporting some assertion previously made, “depend upon it you will find my words correct.”

“I cannot believe it,” replied another, whose respectable appearance, and sedate manner gave weight to his words. “It surely cannot be. What? Soofee Koolee Khan, the Lion Killer—the first of his tribe, with the flower of the army, defeated by a rabble of Affghans! *Astafferullah!* may God forbid!”

“Ay, but it is too late for *Astafferullahs!*” resumed the other. “Lion Killer as he may have been, he met the father of lion-killers in the young Azad-ullah, and he has gone to fight the lions in paradise, if any there be, in company with twenty thousand of his men at least.”

“Allah!—Twenty thousand men! why I hear, the Khan’s whole force did not exceed twice that number. Wonderful fighting must it have been, if twenty thousand Iroonees have been slain! The Affghâns must have been terribly strong; a hundred thousand of them at least, no doubt?”

“In that particular accounts differ; some say the Abdallees had fifty thousand; some a hundred thousand; others not more than ten thousand men. God knows the truth! but this much is certain, that the Iroonees, after performing prodigies of valour, were forced to make the best of their way from the field. And, Agas, let me tell you that these same Affghâns, yaboos, as you call them, are no such fools at fighting: they are hard headed, heavy handed fellows, obstinate as mules too, you cannot get them to give back—no, though they be belaboured ever so much. I have had some dealings with them myself. I went once with a Câfilah to Herat and Candahar, and saw something of them. Wonderful place, Herât, not indeed, like Ispahan, but not a bad place; by your heads, Agas, the place is not so bad; and the air and the water are excellent. Then as for fruit—Allah!”

“Ay,” remarked another, “nor was Candahar a bad place either when I knew it, though God knows what may have happened to it since these Ghiljees with burnt fathers have got hold of it. A wonderful fellow was that Meer-Vais—a true blood drinker! *Penah-bur-khodah!* how he did defile the beard of that ill-starred Goorgeen Khan. I was in the

town, Agas, when that day of judgment came upon it; indeed, I had business with the Khan, who was a true nobleman, a real protector of the poor, and especially of merchants, *mashallah*! Ai wahi! what treasures he lavished on his Gholaums and troops, and what Roostums they were! and what a night that was! nothing but *Hai be-koosh—hai be-koosh—kill! kill! kill!* and the rattle of the shots, and the jar of the scymetars, and wretched Iroonees and Georgians flying from one house to another. But not a door was opened to protect them! *Amaun** was a word these Affghân wolves did not understand.”

“They understand! the unsainted beasts! As much as the hungry wolf heeds the cry of the lamb in his fangs! But if the truth were stated, Meer Vais showed more of the fox than of the wolf on that occasion, and in this respect behaved unlike an Affghân; for yaboos or beasts, though they may be, these Affghâns have no lack of hospitality or good faith to guests among their own mountains; and little of either was then in their chief, when he spread their bloody feast in the garden of Dilgoushâ!”

“Ay, treacherous villain that he was, well did he merit a bloody death, had it so pleased

* Mercy.

Allah to send it to him. But what a wonderful ass was the Wâli to put his head into the wolf's hole. Beware of your enemy, saith the proverb, when he offers you sweetmeats, lest any poison be in the dish; and what sincerity or honest good-will could the Wâli have expected, at the hands of one whom he had grossly affronted?"

"You say true. In matters of the harem, these Affghâns are wonderfully sensitive; strange that such cows should feel so like us Iroonees in any point; for after all they are a rude and savage set—heaven keep us free of them! But after all, the Meer was half an Iroonee; the little good he had was gathered at the Durkhaneh of Ispahan, where he once spent so much time."

"Ay and where, no doubt, he also picked up some lessons of that intrigue he brought so cleverly into play at Candahar. God knows we Iroonees have little to boast of on the score of sincerity. But their new chief Mahmood, he must no doubt be another of your ruffians. He murdered his uncle to get the power into his own hands, and now it appears, he assumes the state of a King, *Mashallah!* A wonderful place is Khorasân, *yaghee* from one end to the other! What with the Ghilgees at Can-

dahar, the Abdallees in Herât, and the Uzbecks on the north, little is the Shah's share in that province."

"Little, said you, comrade? then, by the Shah's own head that little is like to be less; for Mahmood, not content with Candahar, has advanced, they say, into Kerman, and when he will stop, Allah alone can tell! And now this defeat of Sooffee Koolee Khan will set every yelping cur in the provinces barking against the court. Would we could hear more about it!"

"And here, in good time, comes one who can tell you, if any one is able, Allee *Zurgur*,* who is always at the Durkhaneh and in the houses of the great folks. *Selaam-ul-aleecoum! Oustade*.† Allee, welcome hither! Bismillah! your place has long been empty. A calleeoon, *Batchah!* come, sit down and give us the news."

"*Aleecoum-us-selaam!* peace be with you, Agas," softly articulated the goldsmith, a quiet looking, slow moving little person, who, seating himself with some courteous gestures directed to those about him, took the calleeoon which one of the party had just prepared for his use,

* Goldsmith.

† Master or professor of a trade.

by raising its top and letting off the collected smoke; "prosperity to your house, Khojah," continued he, in the same soft tone, after a few long whiffs. "Not bad tobacco this; from Sheerauz, no doubt; you take good care to have it fresh and fresh, as is seen!"

"Yes, yes," replied the other; "we do not let the best stuff pass through our hands without paying custom—the *bees-yek*,* at least, we take. But your news, friend, your news?"

"News, Aga! what news should a poor man like me have? I can tell you something of my own trade, no doubt, and can furnish you with the best articles made or sold, as cheap as any one in Ispahan; but as for other news, they are out of my way."

"To-khodah! man; what words are these? A man like you, for ever with khans and princes, ministers and meerzas, with the ears of all the court in your hand; a man like you, I say, to tell us he has no news, and in such a stirring time too! nonsense!"

"Excuse me," replied the goldsmith, "it is all a mistake. Who am I, that I should have the ears or the mouths of nobles in my hand? I am nobody. But, after all, what news do you allude to?"

"You are laughing at our beards, Allee

* One in twenty-five per cent.

Zurgur ; by your head, this is not right. Do you pretend not to have heard the reports from Khorasân ?”

“What do they regard ?” inquired the imperturbable goldsmith.

“Why, they say that the Sirdar Sooffee Koolee Khan has been beaten by the Abdallees, and has drunk the sherbet of martyrdom along with twenty thousand of his men. Is it true, *Oustade Allee* ?”

“I beg to state in your service, Agas, that it really is said such reports have arrived, but of their truth I am ignorant. The loss is believed to be overstated ; this is all your servant can tell.”

“Wullah Billah ! *Oustade Allee*. This is not as it should be. Thou art not a person to hear or to learn things by halves ; but thou art cautious. Well, thou knowest thy own affairs best.”

“That is exactly the case, Aga, I keep to my own affairs, and am always ready to do a little quiet business or help a friend in the way of my trade ; for instance, I have at this moment, in my possession, a large parcel of diamonds, and some Badaackshan rubies to dispose of, which would suit you, Khojah, excellently for your next adventure to Sheeraz or Bunderabbassi. They are exactly the thing for the Indian

market. Precious stones are greatly in demand at the court of Shahjehanabad. What say you, Aga?" and the quiet manner of the demure goldsmith became more animated as he warmed in his subject on observing the attention of the Khojah fixed, as he believed, in favourable consideration of his proposal.

"*Ham-een tour ust ?* is it thus?" muttered the Khojah to himself, checking a disposition to smile, as he thought he penetrated the motives of his friend. "Well, well, Oostade Allee, to-morrow we may talk about it. In the meantime, I really would fain know something more of these news which are of consequence to us merchants; but time will tell. We shall see whether these Affghân dogs are to have it all their own way."

"What is that, Khojah? what about these Affghân dogs? I will burn their fathers! by the King's salt, we know something of these ghorumsangs!"

The speaker was a young man, clad in a gay silk vest, fitting tight to his shape and bound round his slim waist with a showy shawl, in which was stuck an ivory hilted dagger. A crimson turban, twisted with steel chains, covered his head, and on his feet, which were clad in red stockings, he wore green high-heeled

slippers. The bold leer of his impudent black eye, the long black moustachios trained up to either ear, and the rakish curl that fell behind them, stamped him for one of the dashing military beaux who swarmed about the court. Approaching with a swaggering gait, he sprung upon the terrace, and seating himself upon the first vacant bit of carpet he could find, with a careless *selaam aleicoum* ! he snatched a calleeoon from one of the party, who was using it listlessly, and with a slight "by your favour," set to work, and drew two or three long puffs, which he sent downwards over his breast and person with much apparent satisfaction.

"Ah! ah! very good; welcome, Saduck Beg," said the Khojah; "and what may you know about these same Affghâns? Let us have your opinion."

"*Airuz Shevvud* ! I shall state in your service, Agas," replied the young man, swinging himself about in his seat with an air of infinite importance, "that these same Affghâns are absolute boors, *Hywâns* ! beasts, without the least pretensions to humanity; fellows that think no more of whipping out their long knives, and slaying a man in cool blood, especially if he be an Iroonee, than a King's Nassakchee would think of slaying a robber or a mur-

derer, or a butcher would a sheep; by your heads, they do not. Ah! they are coarse villains; no notion of politeness among them!"

"Well, well, all this we have heard, and it may be true; but we want to hear about the news. You said you knew something about them—the news from Khorasân. What have you heard about Sooffee Koolee Khan?"

"Ah! Sooffee Koolee Khan? He that went to drive the Abdallees out of Herât! Why, they say he has been driven out of the world himself. So much the better, he was a *fuzool*."

"Who says that the Khan was a *fuzool*?" growled an old scarred man, meanly clothed, who, with some others, had gathered to hear what was going on, and who sat a little in rear of the party. "When I fought under his father, in the time of Shah Solymaun, he was neither *fuzool* nor coward, but a stout *sahib-shumsheer*,* and a brave soldier."

"Beheh! the man was brave enough, no doubt, all Iroonees are brave;" returned Saddock, contemptuously. "But as for a leader, he was *pooch*. Leaders are made of other metal. Perhaps, if one were wanted, I could show

* Swordsman.

you some of the stuff. If the Shah or his minister can't choose his officers with judgment," added he, throwing his head on one side, and inflating his chest, "why he must take the consequences."

"Was it want of judgment, too, that sent the brave Khosroo Khan and Mahomed Roostum Khan against that cunning Ghiljee? or can Saduck Beg declare the cause of their discomfiture?" rejoined the old man, with a sneer. "They say that Saduck Beg himself got a lesson in Affghân tactics in the last affair, and that not liking his schoolmasters, he ran away like a bad boy from school?"

"By your head, father, you have heard the truth," replied Saduck Beg, with perfect good humour! the lesson was neither pleasant nor amusing, and I would not stay to learn it out. What need of telling a lie? I ran with the rest; but it was not from fear, Agas; by no means. The air of Khorasân had become too sharp for our health; there were many of the same mind with me. Besides, without a leader, what was to be done?"

"What? no leader, while Saduck Beg was there? Where, then, was all that excellent metal of which he spoke just now? Why does

he not offer his services to the minister? These are the times when good service and good counsel should be worth gold."

"Ay," said the Beg, with cool conceitedness, "when Futeh Allee Khan opens his eyes wide enough to see merit, and gives Saduck Beg a handsome command, he may then teach them how to burn the fathers of these Affghâns, and defile every beard among them, from that of Mahmoud downwards. But Allah will not put it in his head to do anything so sensible."

"What a pity you had not been at Ghourian with Sooffee Koolee Khan," remarked a hard featured weather beaten man, in a travel-stained military dress, who had stood listening to the discourse for a while in silence; "you might have taught him those important secrets; and who can tell but he might have been still alive and safe at this moment in Herat, instead of that fiery Azad-Ullah, whose star was so high upon that occasion?"

"True, Aga; so indeed it might have chanced," replied Saduck Beg, calmly, and taking no notice of the other's sneer. "And pray, friend, what may you know about the matter, and whence come you with these dirty boots and dusty coat?"

"From Ghourian," said the man in a tone that fixed every eye upon him; "where the stoutest of us found more to do than we could master, and so we left the field to the Affghâns and the dead. But, Agas, as you seem desirous to hear the news, give me a calleeoon and a seat, and I will tell you all I know about the matter.

"I beg to state in your service, Agas," began the courier, after having received the required refreshment, "that these Abdallees are neither fools nor cowards, nor persons that will suffer to have their beards played with at the pleasure of others. They have a sense of honour like ourselves, and know how to fight and to die; and their young chief is a very Roostum.

"You may have heard that the Khan had already driven off some bands of marauding Oozbecks, whom he fell in with on his march; and one corps in particular, of twelve thousand, who were threatening a descent upon the holy city of Mushed—may God send blessings on it!—were routed with great slaughter, and many of their carcasses left to feed the jackals. But as the victorious Iroonees approached Ghourian, they found that their enemies had wasted the country, and that neither forage nor provision

was to be had. Many parties were detached to procure the necessary supplies, and in the meantime the Abdallees having girded themselves with the girdle of resolution, and drawn the sword of boldness, quitted Herat and advanced to meet us, determined to oppose our further progress.

“The hour was assuredly unlucky, and the omens were adverse on that morning, when the troops, reduced in number by the absent foraging parties, were drawn out to engage. But they remembered their easy victory over the Oozbecks, and believed that the Abdallees would give them as little trouble. For a while, the battle raged with great fury; but though many fell on both sides, neither could claim the advantage.

“At length, however, the star of Iran was clouded. The flame-breathing mouths of our artillery, which had vomited forth death and destruction on the ranks of our foes, were, through some unfortunate mistake, the effect of evil destiny, turned against our friends. The gunners, bewildered by some wicked spirits and the smoke of the battle, mistook a party of our own troops for a body of the Abdallees. The balls striking some of the horsemen to

the earth caused the rest to imagine that they were betrayed. A movement ensued, which our troops believed to be a retreat; and in a moment, the panic became general.

“Then, Agas, you should have seen the dismal sight. The Abdallees, encouraged by the flight of our friends, charged them with hideous yells; their scymitars flashed on high, but were soon dimmed with the blood of our Iroonees. The brave Sooffee Koolee Khan, disdaining flight or submission, drank the cup of martyrdom; and along with his young son, a bright blossom of the tree of valour, sank overwhelmed, amid the heaps of dead which their own hands had hewn from the enemy’s ranks. Alas, indeed, that such a sun should ever set!”

“Ai wahi, ai wahi! alas, alas! indeed, for the brave Iroonees!” exclaimed the Khojah; “alas, for the brave Khan! But what, after all, is the amount of the loss?”

“Ah! what shall I say, Agas. When all was over, I fled with the rest; nor did we even halt until a body of some thousands collected at Toorbut-e-Sheikh Jamee, when Mahomed Saleh Khan took command, and despatched me and four others with these unhappy tidings

to the *Daur-ul-Sultunut* ;* heavy indeed they are, and small *Mujdeh* can we claim ; but it was the will of Allah, and we have done our duty.”

“ And know you not, then, the number of the slain ? ”

“ Ahi ! Agas, in that hour of judgment, by what account were we to reckon !—who thought of counting corpses, when he felt he might become one himself, if he stayed to look behind him, with the furious Abdallees roaring behind us ? But some say there were five, some eight, some, ten thousand, Iroonees alone left on the field ; and as for Affghâns, there could be no fewer of them ; for after all, the Iroonees fought like lions ; and when they could do no more, they gave their blood ; what else had they to give ? ”

“ Bad news ; heavy news, indeed,” said the Khojah. “ No wonder Allee Zurgur was so loth to tell it ; that cunning knave knew all, and more too, I dare swear. The fellow fears a falling market ; and would fain sell his goods well before the news spread. Well, he shall see whether I walk with my eyes shut ; but what say they to this at the *Durkhaneh* ? ”

* Literally, “ Gate of the Monarchy ; i. e., to the Shah’s palace.

“What do I know, Agas? Had they said less, and done more long ago, it would never have come to this. They might have crushed the snake in the egg; but the dragon is abroad now, and they must quell it as they can.”

“Allah! Allah! Little is the good Shah befitted for such times, or to cope with such enemies; there he sits like a fakeer or moollah, in the dust of humility, and clad in the robes of penitence, praying and preaching like a holy Imaum! If he goes abroad, instead of a gallant attendance of khans, chiefs and stout soldiers, he is surrounded by a cloud of priests and moollahs; within, by swarms of eunuchs and women; and all this time the empire is falling to pieces! East, west, north and south, rebels swarm, and enemies eat us up; yet, here, at Ispahan, all is tranquil and gay as if neither the one nor the other breathed a sound of defiance, and peace and safety reigned throughout the land.”

“Ay, Khojah, in Ispahan it may be so; but let not the timid, or the unprotected, go beyond its gates. How many a poor fellow gets his throat cut, between the Shatir’s tower and the bridge? and the foot-prints of that band of Buchtiarees, who robbed the large câfilah from Sheerauz, and put to death the unlucky Khojah.

Abdoolla, and so many of his servants are still fresh within a fursung of the city. But so it is, when the watchman sleeps on the tower, the enemy scale the wall. May Allah grant we do not all pay the penalty! Yet, a good and kind-hearted sovereign is the Shah; he loves not to see the suffering of his Ryots, and as for punishments, he detests them."

"That is true, indeed, Aga; never is there a punishment in the maidaun, without an argument between his majesty and his officers, viziers, meerzas and all. I remember, one day, in the Maidaun Shahee, as the furoshes were just going to cut off the ears and right hand of a thief, the Shah came to sit in the *Bala-haneh* of the Allee-kapi gate. The fellow was roaring out *Amaun!* and when he saw the Shah, he cried out still louder for mercy, in the name of the blessed Imaum Hoossein. Whether it was the name which smote the ear of the soft hearted King, that joined to his frantic gesticulations formed an irresistible appeal, I know not, but he stopped the execution, made instant inquiry into the case, and ascertaining the value of the stolen goods, ordered the amount to be paid out of his private purse, in order that the culprit might be set at liberty; he then dismissed him with a long sermon on

the horrid guilt of breaking the laws of our holy prophet by stealing !”

“ Ay, it is just his way—a sad weakness it is, Agas, in a ruler, one that tends directly to increase the bloody scenes from which it shrinks. What, for instance, is the cause of the alarming frequency of murder in these days? Why, because the Shah, not content with the *Busts*, or sanctuaries, authorized by ancient custom, has made every *Medressah*, or college, a place of refuge for criminals, so that justice has become a vain word, and every lawless ruffian can work his will with impunity on the weak and peaceably disposed.”

“ God knows that is the truth, Agas, and mark the consequence: commerce is every where obstructed, even the strongest câfilahs dare scarce take the road, while single travellers, or small parties, are sure to be robbed, and probably murdered. Well had it been for the country—well for the Shah himself, had his heart been harder, or his mind more firm. Little does he foresee the burthen he is preparing for himself !”

“ La-illah-il-ullah ! Little, indeed, does he dream of what is going on, even around him. What, in fact, does he think of, but his prayers and his harem. Ay, old as he is, and the

Shah—may his years be increased ! is no longer a youth, still keeps to his old customs, and is for ever, they say, in the *Hummaum*. Every one knows that when he was a young man, nothing less than a virgin, daily, would content this pious prince ; and even now, well do his eunuchs know how to please him, by fresh supplies of beauty ! How often, in Ispahan, do we hear of the daughter of a mercer, or a goldsmith, or other shopkeeper, disappearing ; and all go one way, though few are ever heard of more ; and in the villages, the evil is still worse ; though I, for my part, have my doubts, that others, besides the Shah and his Agas, are concerned in these outrages ; but what is to be expected in such times, and with such a court, but crimes and excesses of all kinds ?”

During the preceding conversation, most of the deputies had either fallen asleep, or were lazily sucking at their half exhausted callecoons ; but the attention of their principals, especially of Hoossein and his father, had early been attracted to their discourse, and the remarks of the last speaker, which bore so directly on the subject of their business, excited the young man’s curiosity to the utmost, so that he turned a still more earnest ear to the speakers.

“ May you die, Agas ;” exclaimed the young

beau, with a reckless laugh ; “ but his majesty is right—he is familiarizing himself, by anticipation, with the delights of Paradise. *Mashallah* ! they will be nothing new to him ! Even the rivers of blessed waters, superior to the finest wine—the Shah, unless belied, can tell the flavour of ! It is said, he was once as steady a toper as his father—may his repose be perfect !—was before him, until that learned old yaboo, Moollah Mahomed Baukher, induced him to break all his wine-pots, and deluge Ispahan with the blood of the grape, instead of that of his subjects. But some assert that he has relapsed into his old good habits.”

“ Softly, softly, not a word about the Moolah !” said the Khojah, in a tone of caution. “ Know you not, friend, that all the world regard him as a saint ? Should but a syllable of such discourse come to the ears of the reverend Meerza Mahomed Saeed, or the admirable Moollah Bashee, why, the *felek* at the least, would be the consequence !”

“ True, by the King’s head ! To speak slightly of a Moollah so near the court is more dangerous than to murder a noble ; and as for wine, why the very word is poison to these holy persons’ ears, though some sceptics may doubt whether the smell would turn their stomachs.

There are two things proscribed, especially in Ispahan—wine and Sooffees. Alas ! divine Hafiz ! Alas ! sage and moral Saadi—and thou, sweet Moollah of Koom ! let not your names be mentioned ; your doctrines are utterly condemned ! It is well for you that ye cannot appear in person, in Ispahan ; for the greatest delight the Moollah Bashee and the Sheikh-ul-Islam can taste, is the stoning of a Sooffee, or the destruction of a secret store of wine. But the strangest part of the story, Agas, is, that the wine vessels have sometimes been known to resist, miraculously, the blows that fall on them, and to make their escape unbroken ; although afterwards dashed publicly, in pieces, to the edification of all true believers.”

“ Ay, God knows the truth ; but men say, that wine was never more plentiful in Ispahan, than now, and that none would miss it more than these very Moollahs, were it otherwise. A fine stomachic is wine, no doubt ; and they, good souls, have all such weak stomachs ! As for Sooffeeism, they say it never was more prevalent, nor were dervishes, calunders, and such saintly freethinkers ever more numerous or powerful, than at this very time.”

“ Well, Aga, and what then ? After all who were the ancestors of this very Shah ? Does

not their appellation declare their origin? Who were Sheikh Sooffee and Sudder-u-deen? Sul-taun Hyder, and Shah Ismael? were they not all Sooffees, or descendants of Sooffees? And why should these holy men, who seek to know the truth, and live in contemplation of the divinity, be persecuted or put to death for boldly doing what they deem their duty, and declaring what they believe to be the truth? As for wine, Agas, after all, it is *Harâm*—forbidden, and we are Mussulmauns. God forbid we should say a word in its favour! Yet these *Kaffers*, the *Feringees*, have obtained liberty from the Shah to make it, and drink it too; and so they do, it is said, by the *Maun*.

“Ay, the Feringees are rich and can give what will win both Moollah and Vizier; they have the ear of the Ameen-u-dowlut, and the key of the Durkaneh, while we good Mussulmauns cannot show our noses there, unless to each *arzee** be tacked a present.”

“Yes, Aga, and even present and *arzee* may be thrown away, unless you have some friend that can smoothe the path, and knows how to make your offering tell in the proper quarters. By your head, this is as necessary as the money

* Petition.

or the writing itself! Of all the *arzees* that are written and presented how many think you reach the King's eye, ay, or that of his minister's chief secretary?"

"God knows that, Khojah; but this I can say, that for all the good that comes of ninety out of a hundred, the *shahees* or the *abbases** that paid for the writing, might as well have staid in the pockets of the honest men who owned them."

At this time, Hoossein, who, in the frank and courteous spirit of familiarity that characterizes a Persian *mujlis* (or assembly) had approached and joined the party, could no longer refrain from mingling in the conversation.

"Peace be with you, Agas," said he, giving the usual salutation, "I pray you to pardon a stranger just arrived in Ispahan on business at the *Durkhaneh*. You appear to know something of the way in which matters are arranged at court; be charitable enough to instruct him how he should proceed, and to tell him who are those regarded as powerful and able to forward a suit!"

"Peace be with you, young man," replied the Khojah, who took the principal lead in the

* Coins of different value.

party. "We are Mussulmauns, thank God, and ready to do a good turn when we can, to those who need it; but the Hakeem must understand his patient's ailment before he can prescribe a remedy, and you must inform us of the nature of your business before we can know how to advise you."

To relate the cause and object of his journey was by no means consistent with the young man's wishes; but he felt that the inquiry was reasonable in one to whom he had made such an appeal, and he therefore prepared to comply with it, so far as prudence would permit. But to speak of the insult offered to his betrothed wife and to her family was a species of profanation to which he could by no means reconcile his mind. So he contented himself with stating that, in consequence of an unreasonable requisition, accompanied with an outrage upon the village to which he himself and his party belonged, a fray had occurred in which some lives had been lost; and that he, together with certain others of the inhabitants, had come to the capital as deputies, to avert, if possible, the consequences, by submission; and to solicit future immunity from such arbitrary imposts as had, on this occasion, been made in the name of his Majesty.

“ Well,” replied the Khojah, “ this does not appear to be a matter of any great difficulty, as you state it. Such frays, arising from similar causes, are unhappily no novelties; and very often it turns out upon inquiry, that the Shah’s name has been abused by scoundrels, who only employed it to cloke their own crimes. You know, you should get an *Arzee* drawn up to be presented to the Shah. Every morning, after prayers, he sits in the Alee-kapi, or comes forth to go to the mosque; in either case you must show yourself, and state aloud that you have such a petition. But stay, you are a stranger here, have you no acquaintances at court ?”

“ Not one, Aga. This is the first time I have been in the city; and as for my friends, it is so long since they visited it before, that their former acquaintances are probably dead, or have forgotten them; as for a petition, Aga,” continued he smiling, “ I fear that mine would probably meet with the fate of those you were talking of but just now. What then is the use of such a thing ?”

“ Very little, certainly, my young friend; without some one to back it, your chance of being listened to might be a poor one, and as for its reaching the royal eye, *Wullah Billah!*

it might as well remain at your village. The great, about court, have always their own hungry servants, whose hands must be greased, or their mouths filled."

"The means for that, Aga, are not entirely wanting; the difficulty is to know how to apply them. The skilful hunter does not waste his shot.

"Barikillah, well said; but there *is* the difficulty. There are plenty of great ones at court, who with a word could do your business, and would do it too, could you get at them; but each of them is hemmed round by a group of dependants, who live by this very thing, and your plan would be to discover them, rather than their masters. There is the Ameen-u-dowlut, Futeh Allee Khan, Vizier, by no means a bad man, of noble blood, and a faithful zealous servant of the King, whatever his enemies may say; but then, who can reach him, except through his Nazir, Caussim Allee, or his favourite Peishkhidmut, Noor Mahomed? These again have their own dependants, who each hold their masters' beards in their hands. Your business lies with the Vizier, but might just as well be done by one of his Meerzas, if you could discover which of them has the affairs of your district in his department.

“Then there is the Moollah Bashee, who is all powerful with the Shah ; were he your friend you might rest in peace. But access to the Moollah, is only to be had through his secretary, Meerza Gholâm Allee, or some of the favoured parasites, who feed upon the holy man. In the same manner, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and the Khodahpâ, and Meerza Zein-ul-abedeem, the Moostehed of Koom, are each able to assist such clients as can make it worth their while, but all of them must be *got at*, you understand.”

“Yes, I understand, Aga,” said Hoossein, with a sigh of flagging hope, as he remembered the utter helplessness of his whole party in the sense pointed out by the Khojah ; “and I fear we have little grounds on which to anticipate success.”

“You must not be discouraged, my son. God will assist the righteous cause, and if yours is such, persevere and doubt not of his aid. It is true I have only pointed out to you difficulties ; but it was rather to show you what you had to do, than to frighten you from undertaking it. Take patience and persevere, and Inshallah ! your business will be effected in due time ; but by some means or other, a patron you must obtain.”

“Excuse me, Khojah,” said another of the party, “but there are other channels to the royal ear, not less efficient than those you have mentioned. You forget the Agas, the Eunuchs; who have such free access to his Majesty as they, the ministers of the *anderoon*? There is the Khojah Bashee, and Aga Hussun, who are said to be all powerful: the first from his age and influence, the second from his polished manners and address.”

“Ay, and there is Aga Ahmed, who stands by his worth and integrity, among the crowd of sycophants; a man whose firm mind and stout heart were never surely formed to be lost in a harem. A strange thing is destiny! but after all, I doubt whether much can be made of these by this young friend. The Vizier himself, if he could be approached, would be best of all.”

“Alas!” said Hoossein, “I fear that is but a hopeless chance. But permit me to inquire, Aga, whether you know anything of one Meerza Taher, who, as I understand, is known at court.”

“Meerza Taher!” repeated the Khojah musing, “many a Meerza Taher may be among the crowds of holy and learned men at court, and in the Medressahs; but who your

Meerza Taher may be, Allah alone can tell ! It is no lucky name, however, here ; for there is one that bears it, who, were it not for a certain powerful influence—some say in the anderoon itself, though others assert it as an influence of a still more mysterious nature, would long ere now, have felt the weight of Ispahanee stones. A rank Sooffee he is, though the fact be not openly proclaimed. But if you wish to make your way here, it were better not to name Meerza Taher. But it grows late,” added he rising, “I must retire. May your favour increase, Aga ! I am sorry, young man, that I have no influence at the Durkhaneh, for I would willingly assist you ; but the court is not my station ; so I can only wish you well. Let me know, however, how you get on, and should any thing occur in which I can assist you, do not fail to apply to me ; you will always hear of Khojah Eussuff Sheerauzee at this caravan-serai. May God protect you !”

So saying, he quitted the place, leaving Hoossein musing, with no small anxiety, over the dubious prospects of success which this conversation appeared to open for the business of himself and friends.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAIDAUN-SHAHEE. THE WALI.

THE mellow voice of the Muezzins from a neighbouring mosque announcing the hour of morning prayer, aroused the weary travellers from a profound sleep; and, after due observance of the sacred ordinance, the Kerbelai and his son proceeded through the long range of bazaars towards the quarter of the royal residence.

It was the hour of morning salaam, when, traversing the superb bazaar of the first Abbas, they emerged from its long vaulted avenue, and the splendid quadrangle of the Maidaun-Shahee, thronged with thousands of brilliant figures, burst upon the young man's astonished vision. Who, indeed, could view that noble area, surrounded by its double arcades, embellished with its magnificent mosques, and the simple grandeur of the Alee-kapi predominating high over all, without being impressed with a

lively sense of its imposing and majestic character? At this time, filled as it was with the noble and the great, glittering in arms and equipage, and splendid horses gorgeously caparisoned, and trains of attendants clad in their gayest liveries, the effect was not only grand, but, to an unpractised eye, entrancing in the highest degree.

Wandering amid these glittering trains, the figures of the rustics, although clad in their best apparel, would have appeared strangely out of harmony with the scene, had they not perceived, mingled among the gay cavaliers, many as plainly attired as themselves ; for, in Persia, the public levee or audience of the monarch is open to the lowest of his subjects ; and although when they pass the prescribed limits, the stick of a *ferosh* is sure to remind them of their encroachment, beyond these limits no one attempts to interrupt their resort.

The audience of this morning, however, happened to be a more private one, held in the magnificent hall of the *Chehel-Sittoon*, within the precincts of the palace ground, where only privileged individuals were admitted, and where the Shah received his officers of state and others who had the right of standing in his majesty's presence. In the Hall of Justice

at the Alee-kapi, however, sat an officer, obviously of high rank, surrounded by officials both within and without the apartment, and, as Hoossein and his father approached, they discovered that it was the Dewan-Beggee, or chief judge, disposing of the causes that came before him.

There was no want of criminals ; for robberies, as has been seen, were but too frequent without the walls, and there were plenty of petty thieves within them ; accordingly the criminal judges had enough to do ; and, on this particular morning, there was, as it appeared, no lack of work for the executioners ; for sharp cries would, every now and then, arise above the loud hum of the multitude, and as they drew near they could distinguish many voices, in tones of earnest entreaty or of harsh abuse and rebuke ; and then the shrill cries of "Amaun ! Amaun ! in the name of Allah ! Yah Imaun Hoossein ! Yah Imaun Hussun !" keeping time to the blows of the sticks as they descended on the feet or thighs of some unfortunate culprit. So wholesale an administration of criminal justice, though not a pleasing scene, was yet deeply interesting from its novelty, and Hoossein, dragging his father, who seemed far less disposed to witness it,

pressed forward to the edge of the semicircle which surrounded the window of the apartment where the judge sat, and before which stood the accused, accusers, and officers of justice.

A temporary cessation of the bastinado and the continued cries produced by it, had been succeeded by two or three short loud shrieks, terminating in lower moans; and just as they forced their way through the ring, so as to see what was passing within it, they observed two or three men standing near a block of wood, one of whom held an instrument in his hand, and another, supported by the third, appeared half fainting, while his head and arm were streaming with blood. He had just suffered the loss of both his ears and right hand, and in this condition he was led groaning away to make room for another, on whom the same punishment was inflicted.

Hoossein, disgusted at the sight, was turning away, when he observed an opening formed on the other side of the ring, through which was led a camel, with its saddle on, and curiosity induced him to remain and see what was about to be done. He was not long kept in suspense. A ferosh, girt with a sword, going up to the window, made some communication to the Dewan-Beggee, who nodded acquiescence, upon

which two other feroshes, stout truculent looking fellows, came forward, dragging a man naked to the waist, who resisted greatly, uttering loud cries for mercy. They were unheeded; for a moment, as the executioners halted in the middle of the ring, the poor wretch pleaded earnestly with the most emphatic gestures which his bound arms enabled him to make; but all in vain, a stern shake of the judge's head was all the reply, and he was hurried towards the camel, which also was led to the spot. In another moment he was thrown on the ground, his heels were tied together, and hooked over the saddle peak, so that his head hung down towards the ground; the knife of one of the feroshes gleamed in his hand, and in another moment the belly of the criminal was gashed across, so that the entrails gushed out. A shout was raised, as if to drown the victim's dying cry, and the *sarwan** immediately led the camel away, to perambulate the streets, as in such executions is the custom.

Sick and horrified at this dreadful spectacle, Hoossein again sought to disengage himself, and, in doing so, chanced to jostle a person, who, if not one of the officers of justice, evi-

* Camel driver.

dently belonged to the *Nowkerbaub*,* or employés either of the court or the army, and who resented the involuntary assault in terms of high resentment.

“How, dog of a boor, are you blind? do you not see me? or do you want to share the fate of that rebel there?” and his hand was raised as if to strike; but either his good nature, or the open countenance, and manly bearing of Hoossein, as he apologized for the accident, arrested the intention, if any had existed, and he added,

“Pass on, Batchah, and take better care; this is an ugly place for one such as you to meddle with a Sooffee of the guard.”

Your servant,” replied Hoossein, “had no design to be uncivil; forgive him then. But, by your soul, tell me what was the crime of yonder unhappy wretch.”

“He was a rebel and a fool, lad. He and some of his stupid comrades thought fit to resist the Shah’s commands instead of aiding the messenger who conveyed the august order, they beat and maltreated him, so that he died; this is the punishment of such criminals.”

A cold shudder came over the young man as

* Literally *fit for*, that is, *of* the military cast.

he listened to these words. Hastily thanking and saluting his informant, he joined his father, and retreated from the circle, which was now separating, as the court as well as the executions, were over for the day. Hoossein was well pleased that his father, from the position he occupied, could not have heard his conversation with the Sooffee, and he resolved to be silent on what had not a little alarmed himself, in order to induce the deputies to keep as quiet as possible until they should have made such inquiries as might guide them to a safe path of proceeding. In the meantime, satisfied that he himself ran no danger of being recognised, he resolved to follow the crowd he saw entering the Alee-kapi, and make what observations he could, even should he not be able to approach the presence.

With this intent he was proceeding, when he received a stern rebuff from the guards at the inner gate of that portal so highly revered by its mighty founder that even he never crossed its threshold on horseback. "What?" exclaimed he, indignantly, "no entrance here?—They say that the Shah is the father of his people, that his ear is ever open to their complaints, and his palace is their sanctuary; and how can all that be true, if the way to the

dust of the royal footstool is thus closed against his Ryots?"

At the same moment, the spears of the guard were withdrawn to admit a noble looking person, whose furred robe was cast over a mailed breast, and whose turban of state was ornamented with a jewel that proclaimed the wearer's rank. The deportment and appearance not less than the words of the young man seemed to attract the attention of this personage, who threw over him a keen but gracious regard; for though his tone was bold, and his manner undaunted, it was altogether free from the air of insolence and abuse which characterize the lower orders of the Persians.

"By the King's Jika, that is a Buchtiaree tongue, Caussim Allee, and a Buchtiaree spirit too, or may I never see Khorrumabad, again," said he, to an attendant near him. "Young man," continued he, addressing Hoossein, "you must either be a stranger or a fool, or you would know that there is no admission here for such as you. If ye have an Arzee, attend the public audience this evening, and ask for Allee Merdan Khan. Away, *beró*."*

Hoossein, somewhat confounded by the suddenness of this unlooked for though gracious

* Begone!

address, could only bow as he uttered the usual expression of thanks, and hastily retire as the gallant figure of his newly made patron passed on, and mingled with the glittering crowd within the gateway.

“Allee Merdan Khan!” exclaimed he, inwardly, as he went. “Allah-il-ullah! is it possible? Can that be the Wâli? He with whose troops I was engaged on that ill-starred day! He in whose service I might now have been enlisted, had not——Wullah! it is strange!”

While musing thus, he observed a person in splendid livery, engaged in restraining two gallant horses, from one of which the subject of his reflections had just alighted. The pampered and high-spirited animals, freed for the moment from the constraint of a rider, were backing, rearing, and pawing, and making at each other with ears laid flat on the neck, out-stretched mouths and fierce whinnyings, while the Meerachor, for such he was, called loudly for the Jeloudars, and grooms to come up and do their duty. But so it chanced, that for the moment they had been entangled by the crowd, and were fully engaged with the *Yeducks* in their charge; and before any one of them could extricate himself, the two wild horses became quite un-

manageable ; and one of them, taking fright at the scream of a mule, fairly broke loose, and levelling with a kick a Mehter who was just coming up, flew off prancing and curvetting, and making the crowd fly in all directions.

All passed so rapidly, that Hoossein, who had seen the danger, though he instantly rushed forward, was too late to prevent the accident. But, accustomed from infancy to horses, and of late a practised horseman, not a moment did he hesitate in pursuing the flying animal, which, between fright and playfulness, and being impeded by the crowd, made but little way. Throwing himself right before it, and seizing the dangling bridle with equal boldness and address, he checked it so severely as to bear the creature back upon its haunches. A few stern decided words completed the affair, for there is no animal more sensible than the horse of the power and superiority of man ; and in another moment the creature stood trembling and startled, but quiet, in the grasp of Hoossein, who patted its glossy neck, and soothed it like a practised groom, until the Meerachor came up.

A loud *barikillah* ! burst from the mouths of the bystanders as they witnessed this feat, and even the Meerachor, foaming with passion, and

bursting with abuse at the horse and the grooms, and all around him, smoothed his brow after the first explosion, and addressed the youth with a "*Khoob kerdeed, Batchah !* well done, lad, here are two abbasses for you."

"I did not do it for money, and I don't want payment," replied Hoosseïn, glancing a little indignantly at the small silver coins in the Meerachor's hands, as he placed the horse's bridle in the hands of a groom.

"What news is this, lad?" demanded the Meerachor in some surprise, as well at the tone of the young man as at his refusal. "Who may you be, pray? There are few Ispahanees that refuse money."

"It matters little who I am," replied Hoosseïn. "But, if you want to know, I am no Ispahanee, but a Buchtiaree of Gilpaigaun."

"I thought as much by that tongue of yours, my lad; and of what village? or are you Eeliaut?"

"Only half Eeliaut. You seem to know the country; did you ever hear of Ameenabâd?"

"What? where old Hadjee Khaleel is Zâbit?"

"The same."

"Then perhaps, lad, you may know something of one Kerbelai Hussun, who lives there? he is Ketkhodah of one the Muhelehs?"

“I should do so, for he calls himself my father.”

“Allah il ullah ! God is great ! thou the son of Kerbelai Hussun ! See, what a thing is destiny ! Thou art welcome, boy, welcome a thousand times. What, man ? we have heard of you ; ay, and to your credit too. By the salt of the Khan, thou must be one of us.”

At this moment up bustled the Kerbelai, who had for awhile been separated from Hoossein in the crowd, and who now saluted the Meerachor as an old acquaintance, by the name of Allee Mahomed Beg. The recognition was mutual, and Hoossein gathered that there had been some former connexion between them, before the latter filled the high and lucrative situation which he now occupied under the Wâli of Louristan. A few words put the Meerachor in possession of the position in which the villagers stood, and their business at the capital, which that functionary assured them should be satisfactorily arranged.

“And for you, my young spark, his highness is not ignorant of your name. You have friends at Khorrumabad who have not forgotten you ; nor shall your courage and address this day remain unknown. Inshallah ! Inshallah ! all shall be

well ; but this is neither a place nor a time to talk of such matters. The Wâli will soon return to his home, which is not far from your caravanserai. Seek me there after mid-day prayers, and we shall then have the whole story at length ; and, no doubt, shall hit upon a means of setting things to rights."

At the appointed hour accordingly, Hoosseïn and the Kerbelai repaired to the palace of Allee Merdan Khan, which was in the same division as the caravanserai Khojah Allee Khan. The Meerachor received him with great cordiality, and listened with great attention to his detail of the business, which had brought them to Ispahan. On hearing the whole, he shook his head.

"Trust me, friends," said he, "there is more in this than you are aware of ; some mischief that you have not yet discovered. This is not the way the Shah's work is done. Depend upon it, had these fellows had the royal *Ruckum* to show, they would have conducted themselves very differently, and made surer work. Not but that the Shah—prosperity to his house ! loves well enough to see a new piece of female ware in his harem, well stricken though he is in years. But, Penah-

bur-khodah ! that is not the way he takes to procure it. These fellows showed no Ruckum, you say ?”

“They showed us nothing but their swords and spears, and gave us nothing but abuse.”

“I thought so. Depend upon it, they were not the Shah’s servants.”

Such in truth, was the opinion of Hadjee Khaleel. He conceived they might be a party with some of the eunuchs foraging for the royal harem, though not by the Shah’s command.

“No, No. Nothing of the kind assuredly, whoever they may have been, or whatever was their object ; neither eunuchs nor gholams of the King had any part in it.”

“In that case, surely there will be little difficulty in obtaining pardon for the resistance we made, or its consequences.”

“Undoubtedly ; but come, I mean to present you to the Wâli, who now knows who you are, as well as of your work this morning. He can do as much as any one with the Shah, and no doubt will put your business in fair train—Bismillah !”

Passing through a superb court and several narrow passages, Hoossein found himself before a large building, the front of which

almost wholly consisted of three immense windows of coloured glass, arranged in little squares and figures, rising in pointed arches from the top to the floor of the apartment.

In this hall, which was spread with rich carpets, stood several servants in attendance, and others in greater number were in the court beneath. At either end of this centre hall, were smaller rooms with one large window in each, and in one of these, the Wâli was seated, in a garb very different from the rich apparel in which he had appeared in the morning.

Being in a sort of *Khelwut* or retirement, in which he received only familiar visitors, or transacted ordinary business with his dependants, he had thrown off the habiliments of state, and assumed those of ease and comfort.

He sat upon a thick felt carpet placed on the more gay stuff of a similar fabric that covered the rest of the floor: his back leaned upon a large cushion covered with brocade of purple silk embroidered with flowers of gold thread; a loose shawl *barounnee* or cloak was thrown around his person; and instead of the ponderous turban, the top of his head alone was covered with a scull cap or *Urruk-geer* of embroidered velvet. Beards not being the fashion of the day, the Wâli wore only

a pair of ample black moustachios, which curled upwards from his mouth towards either ear. Thus clad in the *deshabille* of ease, his keen dark eye, and noble features gave such an air of dignity to his aspect, that Hoossein, profoundly impressed, remained standing in an attitude of deep respect at the lower end of the apartment.

“Approach, young man,” said the Wâli, after a moment’s pause; and, as Hoossein obeyed and came further into the light, he continued, “Ahah! by the King’s life, it is the same young fellow we saw this day attempting to pass the guard at the Alee-kapi, as I went to the morning salaam. You are welcome, youth, doubly welcome. Allee Mahomed, we were not informed of this.”

“Your servant would state that he knew not—”

“Ah! true, true, thou wert not with me; but, no matter. Youth, we have heard of thee; our Isheck-Aghassa has not failed to report thy conduct at the Ab-i-Alishtâr; thou wert against us then, but thou wert true to thy master; and faithfulness and zeal are like gold, above all price, whether in friend or enemy. We loved thy master, and mourned his loss. We sought his welfare, and would have saved

both life and honour ; but he was headstrong, and provoked his fate. But that is past. And now for thyself, what is thy present state and business ?”

Hoossein, thus questioned, mentioned his return to the village, where he assisted his aged parents, and explained that he had only accompanied his father and certain others, heads of families, upon particular business to the capital.

“ Ah, I have heard,” said the Wâli ; “ but their business may be arranged ; and surely a village life is not the thing for a lad like you, who have seen some service, and are both bold and active. We have heard of your exploit this day, and shall willingly employ so resolute and skilful a horseman ; and, what say you, young man, will you take service with me ? You will not be the only Buchtiaree in my household, as Allee Mahomed there can tell you. Mashallah ! they ride well, and strike hard.”

Hoossein, who half anticipated some such proposition, and whose ties at Ameenabâd led him to dread an offer which, under different circumstances, would have been his delight, was not a little perplexed at the frank kindness of the Wâli ; but his thought was only how to escape from the embarrassment. Stepping for-

ward, and kneeling down, he took and kissed the hem of the chief's garment.

"May Allah grant continued prosperity to your highness ! May your favour never diminish ! Fain would your servant serve such a prince, but at present his evil fortune calls him homeward, and he cannot avail himself of so much condescension."

"How, youth ? can your duty be so imperative as to induce you to slight an offer which, be it known to you, we make to few ?" said the Wâli gravely, bending on the young man a searching look. "But, be it as you please," he added, on observing the evident distress which struggled with unshaken resolution in the ingenuous countenance of Hoosseïn, as he stood before him with downcast eyes. "In the meantime, let us hear your business at the Durkhaneh ; you will find me as much disposed to assist you in your own way, if consistent with my power, as I should have been to promote you, had you become my follower. Say on."

In reply to this gracious assurance, the young man, with as much succinctness as possible, related the cause and object of his journey, mentioning incidentally the reason of his own accompanying the elders of his village on their

mission, and ending by a declaration, that these same delegates were anxious to do all in their power to prove their loyalty to the Shah, and to avert the consequences which their evil star was likely to bring upon them.

The Wâli, after listening to his statement, mused awhile in silence, and then intimated his opinion that the outrage complained of had not been committed by any royal warrant, and that, therefore, there would be little difficulty in procuring an amnesty for the villagers for the blood shed by them in self-defence; but, on the other hand, that they, on their parts, would do well to act with the utmost circumspection; for doubtless the party, whom they had thus made their enemy, must necessarily be powerful, as the boldness of the attempt, and the assumption of royal authority, sufficiently testified. "But," continued the Wâli, "I would hear somewhat further of your adventure in the mountains, and of the personage whom you there assisted; you say that he appeared of high rank?"

"He did, your highness; his manners and bearing were those of command; no doubt, he was noble."

"He did not give his name, you say?"

"He declined doing so, my lord, observing

that it was of no consequence; but on giving me the ring, which is the cause of my being now here, he desired me to inquire for one Meerza Taher, who, on seeing it, would assist me if in want of aid."

"Meerza Taher!" repeated the Wâli thoughtfully. "And have you yet seen or sought for this Meerza Taher!"

"I have not even had time to do so, my lord; but the only inquiry I have made regarding him has taught me at least to be cautious of having anything to do with him; and now, with the hope of your highness's protection, what more can I require?"

"It is well, youth, I applaud your discretion. Have you here that ring? if so, let me examine it."

Hoossein immediately produced the signet, which he always wore about his person. It was an emerald, on which were engraved some exquisitely cut Arabic characters. The Wâli took and examined it with earnestness; and Hoossein, who watched his countenance, could see by the change of the expressive brow, first knitting into a frown of keen regard, and then elevated in evident surprise, that not only was it recognised, but known as something pregnant with serious matters. After a few moments'

reflection he beckoned to an attendant, who immediately left the room, but speedily returned, accompanied with an old and respectable looking person, in the garb of a meerza or secretary.

Advancing to the edge of the carpet on which the Wâli was seated, he kneeled down and listened to a few words from that personage, who then showed him the ring. Even the composed features of the old scribe evinced a shade of surprise, as he returned the signet with some low muttered words. A short, whispered conversation ensued, when the old man rising, retired in silence as he came. The Wâli, then addressing Hoosseïn, said—

“ You have already showed your prudence, young man, in the resolution you have expressed respecting this Meerza Taher ; and I now add my advice, that you be silent, not only in regard to him, but as to this signet, which I return you ; a knowledge of its former owner would, at this time, do you as little good as the aid of Meerza Taher. But preserve it, there may come a day when it will have its value. You say the stranger did not come to your village ?”

“ No, my lord ; he never came near it.”

“ Did any person of rank, or consequence,

accompany the Sheikh-ul-Islam on his visit to your village?"

"None but an eunuch, my lord, said to be one of the Shah's Agas. We heard, indeed, that the Prince Abbas Meerza was to have accompanied him, but he went, as it appeared, by another road."

The Wâli mused again, for some minutes, ere he resumed the discourse.

"Enough—remember my advice;—say nothing, either of this signet, or of Meerza Taher, and trust to me. The Shah, this night, goes to perform worship in the mosque of the Medressah Madré Shah, where he will remain till late, so that there will no public salaam; but to-morrow morning he will receive petitions and hear causes in the Alee-kapi, when we shall take care that yours meet with attention. In the meantime, do thou consult with my Meerza in the other room, who will draw up your *Arzee* in the proper form; praise be to God, he will not yield to the first Mustoofee in Ispahan in such matters; and now, *Moorukhus*, you may depart; we shall see you again."

The look of heart-felt gratitude which lighted up the speaking countenance of Hoossein, was more eloquent than his words of acknowledgment, and called forth a gracious smile from his

patron as he left the presence. The Meerza was soon supplied with materials for an eloquent Arzee, and having left that learned scribe to draw out the document in due form, and with all the elegance of style and hand, for which his brethren of Persia are so celebrated, the young man sallied forth, once more, to the Maidaun Shahee, that centre of attraction, in hopes of still further excitement, and possibly of witnessing the royal procession on its way to the place of prayer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHAH. THE WARNING.

WHEN Hoossein reached the Maidaun, it was already thickly occupied. A body of Gholams in their brilliant armour, and rich trappings were going through the military manœuvres of their corps, and exercising with the bow and arrow, the carbine, the scimitar, or the spear.

A finer corps could not have been seen than the one formed by these young men, many of them sons of the first families of the kingdom, intermingled with the Georgians of the household, all splendidly armed and mounted on magnificent horses. Hoossein stood enchanted at a display of military pomp, surpassing any thing he had ever seen or dreamt of. His imagination was dazzled once more, and his heart beat at the sight. The military bias of his mind, which circumstances alone had controlled, became irrepressibly powerful; and forgetful, for the moment, of love and Ausieh, he thought only of accepting the Wâli's

offers, and devoting the rest of his life to arms and glory.

In the meantime the crowd increased; multitudes of nobles, and their followers, entered the square; and the royal attendants led forth the *yeducks*,* and prepared to receive his Majesty when he should issue from the palace-gate; and the whole Maidaun became a moving, glittering mass of men and animals.

While Hoossein gazed at this spectacle, among the crowd of idlers, the music of the *Nokara Khaneh*† struck up; the discharge of camel artillery announced that the King had left the palace, and the youth pressed forward to view the august party as it issued from the lofty Alee-kapi. The *Jarchees*, or heralds, at length made their appearance, followed by a party of Yessawuls. Next came the Shâtirs, or running footmen, and after an interval, was seen the Shah himself, the absolute master of all this pomp and state; but Hoossein looked in vain for the royal mien and dignified deportment which should, as he conceived, belong to so great a monarch.

The Shah was attired with the utmost sim-

* Or led horses.

† The royal band which plays, at stated times, in a chamber above the palace-gate.

plicity. His person was enveloped in a plain kabba, or vest of dark brown silk, over which hung a cloak of Indian shawl, very slightly embroidered, and bordered with fur. In his girdle was stuck a plain gold hilted dagger, and on his head he wore a white turban, in which was placed a very small *jika*, or plume of jewels, with a tuft of black heron's feathers.

His gait was slow and undecided, his figure stooping; and he carried in his hand a *tusbee*, or chaplet of beads made of clay, which he fingered rapidly, as with downcast eyes he muttered his "*La-illah-il-ullahs!*" and "*As-tafferullahs!*" His countenance when seen, though stamped with the traits of hereditary nobility, expressed the prevailing characteristics of his mind—kindness, benevolence, meekness and patience, blended with feebleness and a shrinking timidity altogether unsuited for grappling with the sterner business of life, especially in times both critical and troubled. To a spectator, ignorant of his rank, he might have appeared like some pious Moollah, or devout worshipper of the Most High, who had abandoned the world, and held his way, unheeding unearthly things, with heart occupied only by thoughts of Paradise.

Some paces behind the King, walked three persons, two of whom were obviously priests; the other, not less evidently, a layman. These were the Moollah Bashee, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and Futeh Allee Khan, the *Aitemad-u-Dowlut*, or prime-minister. The first was robed in a dark purple cloak, lined with the finest black Bokhara lambskin, and wore an immense white *Mundeel*, or turban, on his head. The second rejoiced in a green turban of equal dimensions, and his inner garments were covered with a striped *Abba*, or Arab cloak of the finest texture. The Vizier wore the ordinary dress of a noble, when in attendance on his sovereign.

Behind, at various distances, came crowds of nobles and chiefs, mingled with meerzas and moollahs, priests and secretaries; but the faces of the former expressed neither alacrity nor zeal. The most superficial observer might have remarked an air of discontent, of disgust—a proud, yet crestfallen, look, as if they disdained the uncongenial position which they occupied: while the men of religion, and of law, strode on with an aspect of self-satisfied and arrogant importance, which their customary slouching, solemn gait, could not disguise, and which plainly declared both their

sense of power in possession, and their resolution to maintain it.

When the Shah issued from the gateway, the master of the stable led forward a white mule of great beauty, which was kept ready for his use. The Vizier held the stirrup, and both priests bustled forward to assist his Majesty in mounting. When seated, he desired, in a few low words, that they also should mount and follow him, which they accordingly did, keeping at the distance of a few paces in rear, so that they might hear such questions as his Majesty should put to them. The rest did not take to their horses until the foremost of the cavalcade had made some progress, and others followed on foot; the whole being surrounded by a crowd that called for blessings and length of days on a sovereign, whose kindheartedness and lenity had endeared him especially to the lower ranks of his subjects.

Hoossein followed the procession to the mosque itself, and even managed to obtain a glimpse of the meek and pious Shah, as he performed the ceremonial of prayer with an earnestness which proved the sincerity of his zeal. Having satisfied himself with gazing on this interesting scene, he returned to the cara-

vanserai, where, meeting with the Khojah, his friend of the preceding evening, he informed him of the good fortune which had raised him up so potent a patron as the Wâli of Louristan. The Khojah congratulated him with much kindness; and the discourse of the party turned, as it had the preceding night, almost exclusively on the critical state of the empire, the blind imbecility, and excessive bigotry of the Shah, the apathy and improvident luxury of the nobles, and the reckless indifference of all ranks in the capital, to the storm which men of ordinary forecast saw thickening in every quarter.

Early in the morning, Hoosseïn with his friends failed not of repairing to the Maidaun with their petition; and soon after morning prayers were over, the Shah made his appearance in the apartment, above the gate of the Alee-kapi, surrounded by his principal officers of state, and the usual attendance of holy men. The presentation of petitions, and hearing of causes commenced; and tutored by the Meerachor, the villagers of Ameenabâd, headed by Kerbelai Hussun, his son, and the Mussshedee, advanced, and presented theirs through the proper officer.

It was now that they became sensible of the

value of a protector, such as they had been so fortunate as to secure in the Wâli of Louriستان. That nobleman who, from his high station above, had observed the advance of his young protégé, took care that no neglect, either wilful or accidental, should retard the petition of which he was the bearer, from being brought under the immediate notice of the sovereign. But the secretary, whose duty it was to read it, hesitated in alarm, as he proceeded, lest the ear of his royal master might be offended by its unusual tenor.

The Shah remarked his embarrassment; and the decided tone, in which his Majesty commanded the Meerza to proceed, restored that functionary's confidence. When the lecture was concluded, the Shah instantly turned to his minister with an eye of inquiry,

"A singular story this, *Aitemad-u-Dowlut*! When has the Shah been known to send and carry off the wives and daughters of his Ryots? Know ye aught of this affair?"

"May I be your Majesty's sacrifice!" replied the minister, with a profound obeisance; "your servant is entirely ignorant of the whole affair. It has reference to matters that are not in his department; perhaps the officers of the royal household—"

“Astafferullah ! May God forbid !” exclaimed the Shah. “Let the Khojah Bashee immediately attend the presence. The King has no knowledge of the business. Does any one know the men ?”

“May I be your sacrifice !” said the Wâli ; “your servant is aware that they are what they represent themselves—poor, honest villagers, who desire only to pray for blessings on your Majesty’s head, and to be permitted quietly to enjoy that peace and happiness which your Majesty desires should be dispensed to all your subjects. It seems probable, that some evil-minded persons have been seeking to impose upon them by scandalously misusing your Majesty’s august name.”

“Such may, and indeed must be the case,” replied his Majesty ; “for assuredly, the Shah has no part in the affair, nor would ever suffer such an outrage to be committed. The Ameen-u-Dowlut is equally ignorant of it ; we can answer for the Khojah Bashee, who, however, with the other officers of the household, shall be duly examined. In the meantime, however, let justice be done to these poor men. Let a fitting Perwanneh be made out, extending to the petitioners the royal protection, with a pardon for such violence as may have been

committed in self-defence. Let the Aitemad-u-Dowlet see to this ; and let the men return to their homes in peace, giving thanks to the bountiful and omnipotent Allah for his unspeakable goodness !”

A murmur of blessings and applause arose on the publication of this decree ; and the petitioners retired, loudly invoking prosperity and happiness upon the head of the just and benevolent monarch, who so condescendingly listened to the cry of his people, and redressed their wrongs.

“ Alas ! for this kind and noble-hearted King !” thought Hoossein, as he left the place, with a heart overflowing with gratitude and reverence. “ Alas ! that so much genuine goodness should be rendered ineffective by weakness ; that the very virtues he so largely possesses should tend more to the ill of his subjects, and his own misfortune, than the vices of a hard-hearted, but firm and able, tyrant !”

As Hoossein was endeavouring to extricate himself from the crowd, he was forced with some violence against a person attired in a plain military habit, who was among the numerous spectators. A mutual, and not over-conciliatory, examination of each other’s persons was

the consequence; but the young man was surprised to see the stranger's angry glance change suddenly into an expression of recognition and interest, and to hear himself addressed as an acquaintance.

“Allah-il-ullah! do I see aright? Who could have thought of seeing *you* in the Maidaun Shahee? Ah! I see you don't remember me; nor do I know your name, though I cannot forget your person. I am not an ungrateful dog, at least, or I might have passed you by, like a beggar in the street, without your being a whit the wiser. But the fact is, had it not been for you, I might have been food for the jackals at your unsainted village yonder. Do you not remember the Gholaum you saved from being butchered on that ill-fated day, when we tried to carry off the old Zâbit's daughter?”

The mind of Hoosseïn had been completely mystified by the first part of the stranger's address, but his last words opened the young man's eyes.

“Merciful Allah! then you were one of them? In the name of God, I charge you tell me who was the author of that outrage,” added he, grasping the man by the arm. “It is that which has brought us to Ispahan; our

petition is in the King's hands. Tell me, then, I adjure you, by your own soul, tell me, was the thing done by command of the King or his officers?"

"*Yawash ! Yawash !* — Softly man, be patient. This is not the way to go on in the public bazaar, the people will think I owe you money. And so you, and all the greybeards of your village, really believe all that these rascally Agas said ; that the Shah had sent for the maiden to make a queen of her. *La-illah-il-ullah !* what fools men may be made to be sure ! And they have come all the way to court, to petition his Majesty about it. *Ullah ! Ullah !* The Shah, good man, had as little to do with the business as you had."

"What ? It was not done by his orders ?"

"No !"

"Nor by those of his Vizier ?"

"No !"

"Nor by the Khojahs of the anderoon ?"

"No !"

"Then, after all, it was not for the Shah's harem that the maiden was sought ?"

"Not at all."

"Then, in the name of Allah ! and by your own soul, I ask again, who was the instigator of the outrage ?"

“ Softly, softly, *Azeez-e-mun!* this is no children’s play. The Shah is not the only man of might in his realms, nor does the dog that barks the loudest, always bite the hardest. We have to do with those who may be more dangerous than the Shah and all his court, with the *Aitemad-u-Dowlut* at their head, and I may be a fool to put my neck in jeopardy; but come, you saved my life, that is one thing certain. I have been ill-used myself; that is a second thing; and why then, should I go on eating their dirt? By the sacred head of Allee, I will do no such thing. Listen, then, comrade. Let us go aside into this *Outagh*, and by your head I will tell you the truth.

“ It can scarcely have escaped your penetration, if you have reflected on the matter at all, that the visit of the Sheik-ul-Islam of Hamadân, Meerza-Jemal-u-deen, at thy village must, in some shape or other, have been connected with the subsequent attempt to carry off the Zâbit’s daughter. Such was, in reality, the case; and thou wilt, probably, be somewhat astonished to learn that not only was that holy person the contriver of, but in fact the principal in the whole affair.”

“ Allah-il-ullah!—The Sheikh-ul-Islam?”

“ Ay, just, the Sheek-ul-Islam himself;

but listen, and you shall hear. You must know that this same Meerza Jemal-u-deen, who is the son of the celebrated Meerza Mahomed Baukher Majilloosee, is a profound hypocrite, and a determined sensualist. This I have good cause to know, having long been in his service; and I also know that it required all his father's great influence at court, backed by that of his uncle, the present Moollah Bashee, in aid of the specious appearance of self-denial, which he can assume, and the learning which his talents enabled him to acquire, to elevate him to the high station of Sheikh-ul-Islam, in so important a city as Hamadân.

“ Well, this same dispenser of justice, this all virtuous priest, being about to return from court to the scene of his duties, and his power—for in these days the pen has usurped the empire of the sword;—the Shah desired that he should take charge of the Prince Abbas Meerza, who, it appears, had got into dangerous hands, and was not only suspected of entertaining disloyal opinions and treasonable views against the state, or the parties in power, but of having imbibed, from certain heterodox teachers, heretical doctrines approaching to those of the Sooffees. This measure was taken, I have understood, at the suggestion of the chief Mool-

lah, who stood in some awe of the shrewd intellect and fiery spirit of the Prince. But his highness, who had for some time been released from the thralldom of the harem, by his father's indulgence, was as little satisfied with his guardian as with the change from Ispahan to Hamadân, and resolved to return to the capital as soon as he could contrive it, and to amuse himself, in the meantime, with hunting, the country abounding in game."

A light here seemed to dawn upon Hoossein. The stranger whom he had assisted, while hunting in the mountains, who gave him the signet that had so deeply attracted the Wâli's attention, the questions put to him by that chief, the agreement, in time, between that stranger's appearance and the Meerza's visit to the village; the fact that Prince Abbas Meerza was actually in charge of the Meerza, and had accompanied him; so far on the way, to Hamadan; nay, that his highness had, in point of fact, been expected at the village, although he did not come there; all these things arose at once on Hoossein's mind, and a glow of powerful emotion shot through his frame at the conclusion which forced itself upon him.

"It *was* then the Prince whom I was fortunate enough to assist, and this *is* his signet.

I can now partly comprehend the reason of the Wâli for recommending me not to produce it; and Meerza Taher, can *he* be one of those dangerous associates who is said to have led him astray?"

Such were the considerations that darted rapidly through his brain, as the Gholaum proceeded, without, however, abstracting any part of his attention from the main, and far more interesting subject of the discourse; nor did he interrupt the Gholaum with a single observation, as the latter continued his narrative:

"A slight accident to the Prince prevented his accompanying the rest of the party to Ameenabâd, a circumstance which was far from displeasing his reverend guardian; who, though the cause assigned for taking the round about way by that village, instead of the direct one by Gilpaigaun, was that of favouring the sporting pursuits of the Prince, had another and very different motive for the choice. That holy man having, by dint of self-denial and privations, attained his present high position, considers himself entitled to every possible compensation for these privations; and, therefore, indulges without restraint in all the enjoyments which his power and greatness enable him to procure. His cooks are the best that

can be found, and very freely does he partake of the good things they provide. The name of wine is prohibited in his house and in his hearing, but were a search to be made, there would be found in it enough of choice stuff and strong liquors to set up an Armenian bazaar; as for his harem, it might vie in choice of beauty, if not in extent and numbers, with that of royalty itself. Not that this model of morality and continence brooks any limitation in his pleasures, for he gloats upon variety, and exceeds even the Shah himself, it is said, in fickleness of appetite. But considerations of economy lead him always to circumscribe the number of inmates in his harem, which is effected by means the most direct; and those who have lost the power of pleasing are provided for in a manner which secures their silence concerning the secrets of their prison-house; for the Meerza is a prudent man, and takes all possible care that his character shall not suffer from the tongues of babblers."

"His success is but indifferent, it would appear, with all his prudence," said Hoossein, as his informer paused for a moment. "But what an unblest scoundrel the wretch must be! Pray, proceed, however, I am all anxiety."

“Ay, this leads me to the point you require. — You are right: he is known, and possibly may yet be better known. It appears that through some of the jackals, whom he pays to prowl about for prey, the beauty of the old Zâbit’s granddaughter, at Ameenabâd, had reached the Sheikh-ul-Islam’s ears, and he resolved, personally, to ascertain the truth of the report. The consequences you know. He resolved on getting the maiden into his power, and resorted to means for this end, which, with persons less scrupulous and more ambitious than the old Zâbit, have more than once succeeded. Foiled in his attempt, he resolved to push the stratagem further. To deceive a parcel of rustics—pardon me the expression—men acquainted with the court and courtiers, think a simple matter. His own servants and retainers, among whom were some old soldiers, myself and Shumsheer Beg, an old Gholam, among the number, had no difficulty in personating King’s Gholams; nor was it less easy to constitute the wily and experienced minister of his profligate pleasures, Aga Jewah, a royal messenger for the occasion.”

“The unsainted dog!—the base born hypocritical scoundrel! May the curse of Allah,

light upon his head ! may shame and confusion cover him, and may his face be ever black, in the eyes of men !” exclaimed Hoossein, whose fury had risen as his informant proceeded. “ But, thanks be to God, he was baffled ; would to heaven, that he, and not one of his wretched instruments, had been the victim of his crime !”

“ Baffled, say you ; *Azeez-e-mun*—beware how you believe that. The Meerza is no soft-hearted fool to be scared from his purpose by a failure. On the contrary, he will, be assured, press the work more vigorously, from the opposition he has met. Nay a thirst for revenge will be added to other motives. Little as he cares for his people, he will seek payment for their blood ; and whether the Eunuch lived or died, the blows he received will be so many stones added to the heap.”

“ But in the name of Allah, what do you suppose he will attempt ? He may know us now to be on our guard ; and what worse than has been done can he seek to do !”

“ As to that, Allah and himself only knows ! I am no longer in his secrets, and the devil himself might be at fault to guess what Meerza Jemal-u-deen will or will not attempt. As for me I left him with little ceremony, hearing

that the worthy priest had destined for me, among others, the reward that usually awaits his tools ; I knew, in fact, more than he liked. Old Aga Jewah too, who, like his master, would sometimes indulge himself further than is prudent, had let out to me certain secrets, which he cared not should go abroad. In fact, the Aga and I were friends ; fool that I was, not to remember to what such friendships lead ! But an old fox is not to be twice caught ; it was time to look after myself, so after the skirmish at the village, I left it and the service. I have a few tomauns in hand, and my horse and sword, when they are gone ; —the time is fast coming when steel will be worth gold.”

During the latter part of the Gholaum’s discourse, the mind of Hoosseïn had been rapidly revolving what he had just heard, and his heart was thrilled with terror, when he thought of the unguarded state of the village, and the power of its vindictive enemy, as described to him by his companion.

“Merciful God !” exclaimed he, “what is to be done ? The very means adopted to secure their safety, may contribute to their destruction ; for while we linger here, engaged with a shadow, the crouching tiger may have made his spring ! Even the Shah’s per-

wannah, should we obtain it, may come too late."

"Friend," replied the Gholaum, "take the advice of one who knows something of the court and the way the wind sets there. The Shah, may his prosperity increase! is a good King, and may have some power in Ispahan, and over his own offices; but in the provinces he is nobody; his governors do just what they please; and as for these Moollahs, they lead him like a blind jack-ass. Think you, the Moollah Bashee would suffer a perwannah to go forth against his nephew? or were it issued, would the nephew, think you, regard it? How could it be enforced? Nonsense! your village has offended the Meerza, and must prepare for the consequences, which neither Shah nor Shahzadeh can avert. Call your friends together, and defy him. Let these neighbours of yours, the Buchtiarees, now stand by you, and show that the Eeliaut are not to be brow-beaten by a priest. Muster your strength, and stand upon your guard; but if you fear the result, if you distrust your friends, or your own power, then fly while it is yet time, and escape the storm. The days are fast coming, when these priests shall be scattered, and their power broken: a heavy hour of reckoning is at hand; but till it come

ye must avoid the tempest, which ye cannot resist."

"Bitter counsel, friend! bitter, but sound and honest! You have my best thanks for it. But allow me to inquire, as you appear to be well acquainted with the court and those about it; know you anything of one Meerza Taher?"

"Meerza Taher!" repeated the Gholaum, with surprise. "And what can you know of Meerza Taher, permit me to inquire in my turn?"

"I do not know him, but have heard of him as a person of influence. Can you inform me, who and what he is?"

"As for what he is, I can only tell you, that if your Meerza Taher be the man I allude to, he is an object of hate, of fear, or of esteem to those who know him, and they form a large portion of the noble, the learned, and the powerful in Ispahan."

"Hate and esteem? Very opposite emotions, surely, to be excited by the same person."

"Yes; but not the less certain. The Meerza is allowed to be one of the most profound among the learned; and none can deny his claims to piety, goodness, and charity. The hypocrites fear him, for they dread his

penetrating eye. The wise and good esteem him, for they know his worth and virtue ; but the priests and Moollahs hate him, for they dread comparison with his talents and true piety, and sum up their abuse in the bitter charge of Sooffeeism, which true or not seems little to the purpose, as his acts and general conduct sufficiently declare the character of the man.

“ This is he, whose influence over Abbas Meerza created so much alarm among the priesthood, that they gave the Shah no rest till he sent the Prince away to Hamadan, under charge of the precious Meerza-Jemal-udeen, and the same good will would have consigned his friend to the tender mercies of the furoshes, were not his character so high among the people, ay, and with the nobles, that prudence, or rather fear, prevents any attempt at open violence. But the Shah has so far yielded to the urgency of his Moollahs, as to order Meerza Taher to withdraw himself from the capital, or at least, from public view, and at this moment it is not known where he is ; so if you have placed any hope or reliance on this Meerza Taher, I fear you lean upon a broken reed.”

Hoossein mused for a space over this account

he had received of Meerza Taher. The connexion between that personage and the Prince was now discovered, and corroborated his conviction, that the signet he possessed was that of Abbas Meerza. But he also became convinced that be the Meerza's power what-ever it might, he could not avail himself of it in the present emergency ; and under this feeling, he replied to the last observation of the Gholaum.

“ No—no ! neither hope nor reliance on any one but myself, and my own exertions ! Myself will watch over the village and its interest.”

“ You will do well, *Mubârîck bâshud*, may you prosper ! But listen to the words of a friend ; you will require all your skill and prudence ; I am glad we have met, and that I had it in my power to give you this warning. Be assured I have said the truth, and wish you well. I have no other aid to offer, and by my soul, I must now think a little for myself ; so, may God protect you. Farewell !”

The mind of Hoosseïn was already made up. He delayed but to communicate to his father and the other delegates the alarming intelligence he had heard, and to urge their speedy departure from the capital, as soon as they should have reported to the Wâli the sub-

ject of their anxiety, and procured if possible the Shah's written pardon and perwannah; and then having girded his loins and taken the best of the beasts to help him on the first part of his way, he once more traversed the long bazaars of Ispahan, and issuing from the northern gate, took the shortest road towards Ameenabâd.

Sorely did he urge on the sluggish animal he bestrode, which, neither formed nor trained for rapid movement, was ill-calculated for keeping pace with his impatience. The more he reflected on the intelligence he had received, and on the character of his enemy, the stronger grew his apprehensions, and his mind continued a prey to the most restless anxiety, while his brain was filled with images of terror and gloom.

CHAPTER X.

DESOLATION.

THE hour of noon was passed ere Hoossein quitted the gate of Ispahan; and before the termination of the succeeding night, his yaboo, unaccustomed to such severe and continued exertion, fairly gave up, and he was constrained to abandon it. In truth, from the nature of the ground, he knew that a man on foot, by crossing the hills, might reach the village in less time than a horseman could, by pursuing the usual circuitous path, and therefore, encumbered only with his arms, he struck right out in the direction of Ameenabâd. It was a wild and unfrequented mountain tract; the way was rough and arduous, as well as intricate occasionally, and Hoossein frequently found himself deceived in his calculations, and turned from his direction by deep or impassable ravines, or lofty rocky ridges; so that in spite of his most vigorous and unwearied ef-

forts another evening had closed in while he was yet far from the village.

Nor was it with bodily fatigue alone that he had to contend. His soul was haunted by the most gloomy presentiments, a dreadful sense of evil weighed down his mental energy, and he journeyed on with the feelings of a man, who having heard of the occurrence of some dreadful misfortune presses forward in the full consciousness of horrors and of ruin awaiting him, the extent of which, however, being unknown, is fearfully supplied by his busy imagination.

In such a frame of mind the merest trifles become objects of importance, and occurrences which, at another time would pass unregarded, are considered as presages of anticipated misfortune and woe. Each time that an obstacle occurred to delay his progress, Hoosseïn imagined that he could trace in it the agency of some sinister influence; and the very stones and bold fantastic rocks or stumps of withered oaks, that were scattered here and there in his wild mountain way, seemed to his diseased fancy like Ghôls or Jins instinct with fearful power over his destiny. The vast desert of huge mountains, amongst which he wandered like a lost atom, the only living thing, seemed

peopled with unsubstantial forms, and the solemn hum of utter silence, that breathed from the boundless region of air around him, sounded in his ear like the mysterious warnings of death.

The shades of night had fallen while he was toiling up the steep ascent of a mountain, taking advantage of a ravine which he had followed from the valley at its foot, and he had calculated on looking from its crest upon an extensive yeilâk, which stretched to the vicinity of Ameenabâd. He had turned the corner of a sort of buttress that protruded from the summit, and was looking forward to the expected descent, when he thought he heard a sound, in which the cries and shouts of men were mingled with shrill screams or wails of women. It was faint and distant, and he paused to listen, when casting his eyes around, he started at observing what appeared to be the forms of several human beings pass hurriedly at some distance before him from the deep hollow on his right, over the shoulder of the height on his left, where they were lost among the inequalities of the ground; and immediately, with more distinctness, he saw three or four dark animals, which he easily recognised for wolves, follow in the track. Hoosseïn in-

instinctively grasped his arms and prepared against attack.

“Eeliauts?” muttered he, mentally, “and so late among these heights?” and, after a moment’s hesitation, he took the path they had followed, intending, if possible, to overtake and learn from them whether he was in the right road. But what was his astonishment and horror when he reached, by a very rugged path, the height over which the forms had disappeared, at finding that it was but a crest overlooking a frightful dark abyss, into which it sunk precipitously, and which seemed to be an unfathomable hollow, surrounded by craggy walls of the most savage and impassable description.

A cold perspiration stood upon the young man’s brow, in spite of the toil of the ascent. Could the forms he had seen be those of beings made of flesh and blood? Impossible that such could dwell anywhere within his range of vision; yet hither they came, and here they disappeared! What then could they be?—evil spirits, no doubt, pursued by the wolves of Hell! He could not be deceived—so he argued with himself, in what he had beheld; for to what other conclusion could he arrive?

It was a most disastrous omen ! He had been led astray too, that was certain ; he had missed his road, and wandered far from the right direction.

After musing for a while upon the strangeness as well as the unpleasant nature of this occurrence, Hoossein roused himself, and, not without a sensibly sedative effect upon his spirits, sought to repair his error, by retracing a considerable part of his route, and crossing at a lower point, and with extreme toil and risk, the formidable ravine, and finally by keeping further to his right, and nearer to the lower country. Having thus regained his proper direction, weary and exhausted, he toiled on throughout the darkness of a moonless night, his feet stumbling on the rough ground, and his mind painfully oppressed, until a little before daybreak, when having ascended the last intervening ridge of a long succession of rising grounds, with a beating heart he looked down upon the spot which he so longed, yet dreaded to approach.

All was still wrapt in darkness ; but he observed with some surprise the gleam of more than one fire burning brightly, as it appeared, either within the village or in its close vicinity. The anxious spirit is easily alarmed, and his

heart failed him as he gazed on this rather unusual spectacle. But a moment's consideration re-assured him ; the existence of fires argued wakefulness, watchfulness.

“They are watch fires,” said he to himself; “the good folks are vigilant in our absence, *Mashallah!*” and he pressed forward with increased energy ; yet still the dark presages that haunted his nightly journey would come cold over his heart, and the drops that streamed from his brow were wrung from it as much by apprehension as by toil.

He had passed through the gardens of the village in the lower glen, and resolved, on this occasion to obey the calls of duty, before yielding to the voice of love. He kept the left bank of the stream, intending first to visit his own home, the house of the Kerbelai, and of his mother. Might not the irresolution of true affection—the dread of impending evil have had some share in that determination ! The first break of early dawn began to render objects dimly visible, as he mounted the path which led to the little green, with its tank of clear water, which has been described as the scene of so much tranquil enjoyment. Not a soul had he yet seen, nor a sound had he hitherto heard, and the silence struck fearfully

upon his heart. His eyes, as he ascended, were straining forwards into the twilight, to catch a glimpse of each familiar object, when he stumbled over some obstacle that lay across the track.

There was something in the peculiar resistance offered by this substance to his step, which made him instantly stoop to ascertain what it could be : and the thrill of uncertain alarm, which had shot through his frame, was changed to a shudder of dismay at discovering that it was a human body. He raised his hands, and even the cold grey light served to show that they were clotted with the blood that had flowed from the wounds of the dead !

“Almighty God ! is it then thus ?” exclaimed he, while his knees smote each other, and his heart seemed frozen in his breast. “My fears then were just !”

Recovering himself by an effort, he sprung forward again, and gained the green plain, which lay quiet and tranquil in the morning dew, its silence only interrupted by the gurgling ripple of the little stream, as it fell into its clear bed.

But what might these dark mysterious ob-

jects be, which lay so still upon its green surface ?

Again did the heart of Hoosseïn thrill with instinctive dread, as he gazed on the motionless forms. His foot slipped in a pool of clotted gore, which had flowed from the one he had approached, and, looking on the upturned face, now ghastly with the hue of death, he recognised the well-known features of an old Ryot of the village. With increasing horror, he turned to another body, which lay on the brink of the pool. It was that of a woman ; her head and arms hung over into the water, and the blood, which had poured from a deep gash in her neck, formed a red curdled mass in the pure stream around her.

“ Merciful Allah ! it is done ! The tiger has already struck his blow ! ” said the youth, as with fixed eyes he stood gazing on this spectacle. He looked distractedly towards his own home. A smouldering smoke arose from its mud-built walls. He made some hasty steps towards it, but, as he went, his eye fell upon the other Meheleh, which covering the projecting promontory now lay broad in the increasing light. The same ghastly stillness met his inquiring gaze, while here and there, a shower

of sparks, rising from the ashes of a dwelling, as some mass of ruins fell upon the embers, confirmed too plainly the tale of destruction.

With a cry of despair, he quitted the spot where he stood, and rushing across the wooden bridge, unheeding the traces of the spoiler, which now met his glance on all sides, he stopped not until he reached the house of the old Zâbit. As he approached the door, however, his heart failed him ; it was wide open, yet he dared not enter, but stood listening with breathless eagerness for a human sound. It was in vain : neither word nor groan broke the death-like silence. Human nature could endure no more ; heedless of consequences he entered resolved to learn the worst, and proceeded rapidly to the entrance of the Khelwut. There once more did he check his course, and listen for some familiar sound. But all was still as the grave ; and, at length, distracted with his own thoughts, he called aloud upon the Hadjee, and in more tremulous accents, on his beloved Ausieh, conjuring them, or any of the household, to give answer, and come forth. But no answer was returned.

The first sudden conviction of a dreadful calamity, though it falls upon the heart with

stunning force, is often, especially in minds of strong elastic texture, succeeded by a fervour of reaction, which, like the hot fit of a fever is proportioned to the violence of the previous shock. Thus it was with Hoossein; the gloomy anticipations, and dispiriting impressions under which he had laboured, during his journey, had rather weakened his mind than prepared it for the terrible blow that awaited it; and the energy, or rather fury, with which it now rose under the sense of the misery and ruin which he saw around him, was rather the baneful creation of despair, than the firmness of deliberate and high-toned constancy.

Under such excitement was it that the young man now rushed through the silent and empty dwelling, calling passionately on its former inmates, more than one of whom he stumbled over as they lay exhibiting ghastly proofs of the violence with which the place had been visited. At length, having reached the innermost apartment of the women, while he paused for a moment to view its rifled and violated walls, his ear was struck by a feeble cry or groan. Waiting some seconds for a repetition of the sound, he called aloud upon the sufferer, entreating a reply; another melancholy wail was all the answer, and rushing to the

quarter from whence it issued, Hoossein, with horror, discovered on the bare floor of one of the women's chambers, which, like the rest, had been rifled of all its contents, the hospitable owner of the dwelling, the venerable Hadjee Khaleel.

"Merciful Allah! is this possible! What, oh father, has happened?" exclaimed the young man, heart struck as he knelt down by the side of his aged friend, and took hold of one hand which lay listlessly across his breast; but the Hadjee, scarce turning his faint and vacant eye upon the youth, uttered only another moan. "In the name of God, speak to me, father; it is Hoossein that calls. Tell me what has happened? Where is Ausieh?"

At the name of his grandchild, the Hadjee uttered another heavy groan, and Hoossein, seeing that he was as yet unable to speak, pulled off his own garment, and placing it under the old man's head, said, "Take courage, father, I will prepare a place for you, and do my best to assist you. By the blessing of Allah, you shall yet do well." Then hastily searching through the pillaged *anderoon*, he discovered some pieces of old numuds and carpets, rejected, doubtless, by the plunderers,

and formed a couch on which to lay the old man. The exertion of being lifted thither appeared to revive him, and he opened his eyes with more intelligence than before, and faintly articulated "water."

In a moment, Hoossein had rushed to the reservoir, which supplied the bath, and served for household purposes, and returned with a supply of water, which he held to the old man's lips, and with which he bathed his face and temples; but observing his trembling limbs, and remembering that the morning was chill, he again left him to procure fire. Alas! the search was easily successful, there was enough of burning fuel to be had with little labour, and a genial blaze soon shed its cheerful glow through the apartment, and over the Hadjee's limbs.

These attentions seemed to recall his fleeting breath. He looked around him with an anxious gaze, and as his eye fell upon the person of Hoossein, it lighted up with a faint expression of recognition.

"Hoossein, my son! is it thou?" muttered he at last. "From whence art thou? What has happened to me?"

"By the mercy of God, it is truly I, father," replied the youth. "But what has happened,

I know not, though I burn to know. In the name of Allah, how came you thus?"

Again did the bewildered air of the old man, as he looked slowly round, go to the heart of Hoossein, who seeing him sink, as it were into himself, possibly in an endeavour to conjure up some recollection of what had passed, feared that his intellect was fled, and watched breathless for the event; but after a silence of some minutes, a ray of intelligence lighted up his eye, though mingled with a painful expression of alarm; and he shuddered violently, as in feeble and husky tones, he said "Hush!—where are they?—are they gone?"

"Who? in the name of Allah?" replied Hoossein. "There is no one here—no one but I, your friend, your son; so be at peace, father."

"No?" said the old man, doubtingly. "And where is Ausieh then, and Fâtmeh, and the rest?—why have they left me here?"

"My father, it is that which I die to know. Where is Ausieh—what has become of them all?"

"Ausieh? Have you not seen her?—is she not with you?" said the old man, with a tone of mingled apprehension, and confusion. "Oh, great God, what has happened to her?"

“And cannot you then tell me, father? Great God, I shall go mad! Who has done this, my father? By your own life, reflect and tell me.”

“Alas! my son, what can I say, what could I do? But, but my brain reels. I cannot speak; water, my son, water; and leave me in peace—peace!”

Hoossein, after holding the water once more to the aged Hadjee’s mouth, saw, with unspeakable distress, his eyes close in what he feared was the sleep of death.

Hanging over him with intense anxiety, he watched the features of the dying man, believing that each long gasp, which convulsed his breast, was to be the last; but, after a while, his breathing grew more easy, and his countenance, though wan and cadaverous, became more placid, until, like the slumber of a vexed infant, his trouble seemed to cease, and he sunk into calm repose.

Gloomy, indeed, were Hoossein’s reflections, as he watched the lowly couch of his aged friend, amidst the ruins of that house with which all his fondest recollections were connected. Anxiety, deep and bitter, wrung his bosom, and stirred up the latent fever in his veins. The soul of his life, the object of all

his warm affections, snatched from his very grasp, just at the very moment when she should have become his own, and not a trace of aught but the ruin caused by the catastrophe which robbed him of her! A full and terrible conviction rested on his mind, that the Meerza was the author of this new and far-surpassing outrage; yet a ruin so extensive, and so sweeping, how could it have been effected by any individual in the Sheikh-ul-Islam's situation, how great soever his personal influence?

The brain of Hoossein was bewildered. The first fierce burst of despair passed away, but in its place came that gnawing fever of anxiety which mocks at rest; and as he sat, gazing with troubled eye, and in-held breath, upon the sunken countenance before him, the death-like silence of all around became intolerable. The most violent exertion, the fiercest bodily pain, would have been preferable to this solitary mental anguish; and Hoossein, at length, observing that the old man's sleep was deep and uninterrupted, arose with caution, and went forth to search for some other vestiges of life and to discover the extent, if not the cause of, the catastrophe.

The dwelling of the Hadjee exhibited sufficient proofs of violence. The rooms were

stripped of even the simplest furniture; and the broken doors and torn *purdehs* showed how mischievously active the pillagers had been. Shreds and fragments of female dress were strewed about; the floors were stained with blood, and one or two of the aged inmates lay mangled where the spears or scimitars of their inhuman butchers had overtaken them. From these no new information was to be gleaned, nor could further conclusions be drawn; and Hoosseïn, with a shudder, and a thrill of indignation, rushed out into the open air.

The sun had now risen, and the mountains around were smiling in its ruddy light. A thin, gauzy vapour softened every harsher feature of the landscape, and lent to the dells and hollows that blue, mysterious shade, which speaks so powerfully to the imagination, hinting of secret beauties that lie concealed in their deep recesses. The air exhaled a balmy and delicious freshness; and peace and harmony seemed to breathe from the whole face of nature. It was a scene formed to rejoice the spirit of man, and to call for blessings on the Almighty hand that formed it. Yet that wayward and rebellious spirit had converted it into a wilderness of mourning and desolation! All was still and tranquil; but it was the silence

and tranquillity of death. The dwellings, which at that hour were wont to echo so joyously with the shout of manhood, the softer voice of woman, the happy careless laugh of childhood, or the wail of helpless infancy, and which used to pour their hundreds daily forth to cheerful labour; what were they now?—voiceless, desolate ruins, reeking with the blood of those whom they had so lately sheltered, or encumbered with the ashes of their fire-scathed roofs.

The heart of Hoosseïn, exhausted as it was, swelled again almost to bursting, and his spirit sickened, as he gazed and listened in vain, and saw the thin blue smoke, still rising from the blackened walls, as if in mockery of the peaceful happy hearts, which but a few hours before had existed there; for there was neither sound nor motion;—the spirit had, indeed, departed.

Hurrying down the steep pathway, to the little wooden bridge, Hoosseïn crossed to the other side, and once more stood upon the Maidaun. There it lay, calm and silent as before, tenanted only by the dead; and as he stooped to bathe his brow, and quench his thirst, from the basin, he started with an emotion of horror, at seeing the crimson clots, still floating in its clear waters. A few mo-

ments more placed him on the terrace, before the Kerbelai's house, and he groaned as he viewed the desolation and thought of the misery which awaited those friends, who would so soon arrive at their ruined homes.

The hand of the destroyer had fallen heavier here, than even on the dwelling of the Hadjee. Fire had done its office, thoroughly; the roof and everything combustible, had been consumed, and the walls, scorched and blackened, alone remained. The little court was covered with ruins, among which rags of apparel and fragments of furniture were to be seen; but vestiges of human victims were rare. Perhaps they had been removed by the devouring element. In vain did he search for the remains of those he had known, and though his flesh crept at the sight of a scorched and mangled mass, that had once been a human being, he was spared the misery of recognition.

How little do we know the amount of misery, which the human heart can endure; or rather, how far are we from estimating the strength, which He who sees fit to afflict us, may lend to support us in the hour of trial! Worn and exhausted, and heart-struck as Hoossein was, at the sudden and total sweep of his family, above all at the loss of her, who

was the light of his eyes, and the life of his soul; still did he not sink under the blow. The first shock passed, he rallied his firmness, shook off despair, and recovered his presence of mind. Tortured, indeed, with anguish, but nerved with a strength that could only be given from above, the young man searched amidst the ashes of his home, for the relics of his murdered family, and gazed upon the ruins of that pleasant village, which had so long been his happy abode.

After musing for a while, over the melancholy scene in bitterness of spirit, he turned and ascended the steps, which led to the mosque above. Even here, were the traces of violence, and the fugitive had fallen under the murderer's sword, on the very threshold of the holy place.

Again he cast his eyes over the desolation, and was about to descend, once more, and recross the stream, that he might take a look at his aged friend, before proceeding with his examination of other parts of the village; when his attention was attracted by a slight noise, proceeding from a heap of rubbish in a dark corner.

Pausing with an emotion, made up of hope and fear, to examine the place, he observed the

head of a man, cautiously thrust forth from the heap, and gradually rise, until the whole figure became visible. The garb, soiled and stained, was that of a peasant, and the wearer gazed around, with an expression of great apprehension, till seeing no one near, besides Hoossein, he ran forward, and with a cry, which partook as much of grief, as of joy, threw his arms about him and embraced him.

“Caussim! is it possible?—Welcome, in the name of Allah, welcome!” exclaimed Hoossein, recognising his foster-brother, and bursting into the first tears he had shed, as he returned the rude, but affectionate embrace.

“Oh, Caussim, what a scene!” continued he after some moments’ space, “tell me, in the name of God, how all this happened!”

“Ay, how indeed! miserable wretches that we are!” exclaimed Caussim, giving way, in his turn, to a burst of intense grief. “Oh! Hoossein, Hoossein, we have, indeed, fallen from heaven to earth; our good stars have hid themselves; our enemies have prevailed. The day of judgment—the day of judgment has come upon us!”

“But who has done it all; who are the villains?” demanded Hoossein, not less moved; “and how did the thing take place?”

“Who? what villains? Who, but those doubly accursed Suhoonees, along with the very scoundrels whom we beat so handsomely not ten days ago; they who wanted to carry off the old Hadjee’s grandchild! May their souls burn in hell!”

“Allah-il-ullah! I was sure of it! But Ausieh, Caussim, Ausieh! tell me, man, for God’s sake, what of her? is she dead, dead like the rest; are all destroyed Caussim?”

“Oh, would to God, I could tell; but what can I say? I know nothing! My very heart has become water! alas, alas! What dust has fallen upon our heads! Yesterday, at this time, all was so well, so happy; and now, Ai Wahi, Ai Wahi! but God’s will be done!

“And know you nothing of Ausieh, Caussim? What has become of her? Of them all? The whole family seems to be swept off. Alas, for the good Hadjee; but come, let us go to him; if it please God he may yet recover!”

“The Hadjee? Penah-bur-khodah! he is gone. May he taste the joys of Paradise! They have slain him; he and all his household are slain, or carried off; it was there the blow was aimed.”

“No, Caussim, the miserable Hadjee still lives; not half an hour ago I left him in life,

though grievously ill, and by the blessing of God, we may bring him round."

"Inshallah! Inshallah! but merciful God! What a sight!" exclaimed the poor creature, as he looked abroad over the ruined village. "Oh, heaven! that these should be our pleasant homes! The villains! the accursed dogs!"

"But after all, give me some particulars of this dreadful business," said Hoosseïn, after his companion had regained some composure; "as yet, I know nothing but what I see before me. It was but last night, you say?"

"Only last night; and all was so quiet and so peaceful, and the watch was set too: the unsainted rascals of guards must have gone to sleep, and that early too, for the hour of midnight had not yet arrived, when I was awakened by shouts and cries, which came from the other side. I started up, and out I rushed; but before I had got my eyes well open, the miscreants were close upon us. Men and women were flying before them, and torches were already blazing, and spears and scimitars glancing. Unarmed, and alone, what could I do, but fly? So I ran, as others did, and saw some cut down and others fall into holes and ravines; and what became of them Allah knows. For myself I scrambled down the bank into the bed of the

stream and hid myself up to the neck in water between two stones; and I heard the plunge of two or three of the unfortunate, as they were tossed over the bank by the spears of these accursed miscreants !”

“ But, after all, how do you know they were Suhoonees, or Buchtiarees, at all, Caussim? could you see them so well ?”

“ I did see them, Hoossein. I saw them well. I knew them by their caps, and their short spears; they were Roostum Beg’s men, by your head, they were. But I saw the others too; I knew the shields and carbines of the Gholaums, and the furniture of their horses; and they shouted Yah Allee for Shumsheer Beg! Yah Hyder! for Gholaum Allee; these were the names of the dogs whom we slew, the other day, at the Hadjee’s house.”

“ And saw you no more of the business ?”

“ Pardon me, I did. There was no lying long in the cold pool; so when the noise and the hubbub had passed me I scrambled out, looking cautiously about, lest I might fall in with any stragglers; and it was while I sat just yonder, behind that point of rock, that I saw the rush made at the Hadjee’s house, and heard the cries of the women.”

“ Great God! and could you sit and listen

to their cries, and resist flying to their assistance ?”

“ To.Khodah ! man, what words are these ? What was I to do against two score of ruffians ? It was much better surely to keep quiet and watch their motions, which I did ; for while the plundering and murdering was going on all through the village, I crept along the banks, and saw the party that had entered the house rushing from it with some of the women in their arms, and more than one poor creature was cut down while I was looking on, as they made for the path that leads down the valley.

“ The fires had now begun to blaze, and threw a light over everything, which made concealment very difficult, and several helpless wretches were discovered and slain ; but after a while, I saw the villains drawing together, and one party held across the hills, while the rest took the short cut towards Gilpaigoun.”

Hoossein groaned deeply.

“ And this,” said he, “ is all you know ?”

“ Nearly all,” replied Caussim. “ When I thought they might be fairly gone, I stole towards the Hadjee’s house to discover what had passed there, and whether the old man had escaped. I was hastily approaching the door-

way, when a shout at no great distance alarmed me ; and fearing that the mauraunders were returning, I made my retreat and hid myself again. In fact it was a party of them who had remained pillaging the upper part of the Meheleh, and were hastening after their companions ; so not knowing how many stragglers there might be, I returned to my hiding place beneath the bank where I lay till day-break. I had just risen from it, intending to examine the state of our own Meheleh, when seeing your figure amongst the trees, I hid myself in the mosque till I should learn who it was."

"Great God, what a blow ! What a fatal night ! But what, in the name of Allah, can have become of all our friends ? All cannot, surely have been murdered ? Some must have escaped like yourself ?"

"No doubt of it ! But Allah-il-ullah, the roar and the blaze of this night of judgment is still in their ears and their eyes ; they think the spears are yet at their breasts, they scarcely know whether they be alive or dead, and lie hid doubtless in caves and holes, or have fled to the distant mountains. Ai wahi ! Ai wahi ! many a one is gone for ever. And, as for the village, never will it lift its head from this dust again."

While talking thus they had crossed the bridge, and ascended to the Hadjee's house. They found the old man, as Hoossein had left him, still sunk in calm and tranquil sleep, and they sat down to watch his slumbers, and talk over the events of the past night. Racked with distress and anxiety as the mind of Hoossein was, he had now a companion in his grief; and sorrow thus shared is shorn of half its sting.

Alas! how sorely misled are those who rave about the delights of solitude; about the calm and cheerful tranquillity of perfect loneliness! Let such theorists test their vain philosophy in the hour of danger and distress, when the soul, oppressed with anxiety and fear, yearns for sympathy and support, and seeks in vain for a friendly breast to lean upon. Place them by the dying bed of their sole remaining friend; their companion in many a weary march in distant lands; let them feel the misery of watching the progress of disease which they cannot arrest; of witnessing the struggles of sinking nature, as the lamp, at length, exhausted, quivers, and expires. Let them learn what it is to gaze upon the ghastly remains of one for many a day the partner of their joys and sorrows, with whom they had striven in

hardship and difficulty, and taken "sweet counsel" in the hours of relaxation and repose; and let them abjure their fancied love of solitude, and give fervent thanks to the Author of every blessing, for the comforts of social intercourse, for the delights and sympathies of friendship!

Hoossein keenly felt the comfort of companionship; and though the misfortunes he had to deplore were in no degree less real, or less grievous than before, he experienced an inexpressible relief in conversing upon them, and lamenting the common loss in the company of Caussim. The Hadjee still continuing in that state of repose, or insensibility, so nearly resembling death, although his gentle long-drawn breath assured them that he still did exist, Hoossein left his friend to watch for a time, while he himself went forth to examine further into the state of the village.

But the search only served to multiply the sad and harrowing traces of the outrage, and to prove the ruthless character of its perpetrators. Restless, wretched, and unrelieved in any way, he returned to the gloomy sick chamber—to the presence of his only friend; and thus heavily passed the tedious hours, until the sun was low, when a change became

visible in the aspect of their patient. His sleep became troubled ; convulsive twitches of the countenance denoted the presence of some latent evil. He gasped as if for breath, and after an effort or two to move, he awoke, and gazed around him.

“ How fares it, my father ? ” asked Hoosseïn, hastening to his side, “ you have slept well ; please God, you are better.”

The eyes of the Hadjee, heavy and dull as they were with approaching dissolution, lighted up with an expression of pleasure and intelligence, as they rested on the young man.

“ I thank God, my son,” said he, “ all is well ; all will soon be passed, and I shall be at rest.”

And the feeble voice, and indistinct utterance, not less than the words themselves, withered the hope which Hoosseïn had still cherished in his heart ; he strove against the painful emotion, however, and tried to impart the comfort and confidence which he could not feel.

“ What words are these, father ? ” said Hoosseïn, swallowing the choking sensation in his throat, and endeavouring to speak cheerfully ; “ have a good heart ; you only want sustenance and rest ; we shall prepare some food for you,

and you will eat : and then, Inshallah ! you will do well, and—”

He could not go on : for the thought of all that had occurred ; of the utter ruin of the village, the slaughter of its inhabitants ; and above all, the loss of his darling grand-child, flashed upon the young man’s mind, and arrested his words ; he could have wept aloud, but speak he could not.

“ Oh, hush, my son ! ” said the old man, “ wherefore should I seek to prolong existence ? what is there left to live for here, that I should cling to the burthen of life ? Is not everything lost ?—Tell me—but need I inquire ? are all destroyed ?—my children, my family, neighbours and friends, have all been swept away ? ”

Hoossein had no power of utterance ; his reply was written on his brow. The Hadjee understood it ; and casting up his eyes to heaven, in faltering accents, exclaimed,

“ Merciful Allah ! to thee we owe every blessing ; from thee did all things come ; at thy will they depart, and return to thee ! What is man, that he should repine at thy commands ; shall he accept of good from thy hands, and refuse to receive evil ? Blessed be thy holy

name ! Hoossein, my son—my dear son, restrain these tears ; remember that what is written, must be ; for who can alter destiny ? Thy heart is warm and kind, my son, and this blow will bear heavily on thee ; but thou art young, and please God, many and happy days are before thee, and thou mayest find other friends, and other objects of affection, for thou art worthy of them. Yet she—she whom thou lovedst, Hoossein, she who was the light and the pearl of these aged eyes, never wilt thou see a fairer flower, and never find a more devoted heart ! Alas, alas ! that, in my last moments, her sweet voice cannot meet my ear ; never, never shall we hear it more !”

“Oh, God ! Oh, God ! father,” exclaimed Hoossein, rising up, with a frantic gesture, “do not speak thus ; do not break my heart ! I swear to thee, by the omnipotent Allah, that if life be spared me, Ausieh shall yet return. She shall be restored to thee, father ; she shall once more bless thy sight, and the sound of her gentle voice shall again gladden thine ear. I will seek her, father—yes, by the help of Allah, I will tear her from the foul ravisher. Ay, my very heart’s blood will I give to requite him. Live without Ausieh ?—Allah ! it is

impossible. Heaven will not thus desert us, father. I shall succeed, and thou shalt see her yet again!"

"Never, my son, never! my hour is at hand. I feel it fast approaching; see, my limbs are already cold. I never shall see her more; but God prosper thee, my son, and if it be his will, she may yet be rescued from the ruffian's hands. It was that priest, Hoossein, that villanous priest. Oh, Allah! that so foul a hypocrite should be suffered to serve at thy shrines! Yes, my son, I heard his name; it was shouted by the miscreants, as they hurried her from me, before the cowardly blow was struck, which levelled this old frame to the earth."

"Villain, villain! but, by the holy prophet, he shall pay dearly for it. Great God! where can she now be?—what may not be her fate?"

"Trust in God, my son; may his arm be thy shield!" said the Hadjee, yet more feebly. "Hoossein, raise me, my son; let me feel thee, for my eyes are dim. I thank the bountiful Allah, that he has sent thee thus at the last. I do not die utterly forsaken; and these old limbs, thou wilt see them decently interred? These withered arms, boy, often have they

held thee as a child; and her, too—how often have they been folded round her! Oh, Allah! that in this my dying hour, both she and all should be torn from me; but it is thy will, O God, and thy servant murmurs not! Heaven bless thee, Hoossein; and thou, too, Caussim, I see thee no longer. Oh, holy prophet!—Allah, Allah!”

The voice sunk to a faint moan, the glazing eye grew fixed, the heart ceased to beat; and the kindly spirit of the venerable Hadjee left its feeble tenement of clay to enter the presence of its Maker and its Judge.

“May Allah grant thee happiness in Paradise, thou kind and good old man!” exclaimed Hoossein, mentally, as he closed the upturned eyes; but his voice was choked with sobs, and he could not articulate a word. Aided by Caussim, he placed the body in its due position, and performed the first requisite duties to the dead. Then, retiring a little from the couch, he gave way to the burst of grief which would no longer be restrained.

It was a salutary relief; for, hitherto, his high-wrought feelings had been kept at an unnatural stretch, and his brain could not long have endured the weight which oppressed it. Even Caussim, who would fain have offered

some words of comfort, was far too much moved himself to interrupt the flow of his companion's grief, and for a while it took its course unrestrained. But the urgent nature of their circumstances admitted not of long indulgence in delay.

"Hoossein!" said Caussim, "what is to be done next?—the poor old man cannot be suffered to lie thus long?"

"Assuredly not," was the reply; "our duty must be done, and that without much delay."

"Ai wahi! ai wahi! that such a duty should fall to our lot; to discharge it to all of our friends and comrades, that lie exposed to the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, is impossible; but, as for the good old Hadjee, by your own death, were it my last work, his bones should rest secure from outrage. Would we had a Moollah here!"

"*Astafferullah!*—God forbid! What? have we not had enough of these accursed priests, that thou shouldst wish for another? No! may Allah grant that I set hands on yon miscreant's throat, and then, *Alhumdulillah!* I have done with priests for ever! Think you, that the bridge of Al-Siret would give easier passage, or the gates of paradise open more

readily to the kindly, virtuous soul that inhabited this heap of clay, because a villain, like Meerza Jemal-u-deen, had said the Fâtheha over his body, or read the Korân over his grave? Should our own simple-hearted Moolah have escaped, which may Allah grant! he may read as long as he pleases over the good old Hadjee's tomb; but, in the meantime, let us act our part as good Mussulmauns. Let us stay here, without, till morning, when we shall carry his remains decently to the place where his own people have been laid; and on his grave will I swear to exact from that deceitful, treacherous hypocrite, the price of blood to the uttermost dinâr; ay, a maun for a miscal shall he pay, or add mine to that which weighs upon his head already!"

"Afereen! Inshallah! it will be so; but after all, how is it to be done? You know I am not a friend to blood and slaughter; but by the soul of my father, and your own head, I would put life and limb in jeopardy to take revenge on the accursed dogs that have done us this unspeakable wrong. But I ask again, how are we to proceed?"

"A stout heart and a willing spirit, with a little judgment, Caussim, will do wonders, and please God, the means shall be found. The

robbers must be traced to their den. They think the snake is killed, and will feel secure—they may find their mistake, to their cost; but, mean time, let us take some repose. Three days and nights have passed since I rested, and my bones ache and my head swims. Were it only for the sake of revenge, I must try to support my strength.”

“Three days and nights! Penah-bur-khodah! then you have come all the way from Is-pahan without a halt?”

“No halt have I had, *Humsheereh*; and since my horse gave up, I made my way on foot. I had no choice.”

“Allah-il-ullah! and had you no food?”

“For the last two days nothing, save some crumbs of bread and water, have entered my mouth!”

Caussim could only groan, “This will never do!” he muttered, and yet where is food to be had now? Allah, Allah! I will, I must search for it—he will die!”

“Trouble not yourself, comrade; were the best of food here before me, I could not taste one morsel; in the morning, perhaps, but not now, I may. I am faint, sick, and my eyes burn; so let me lie down at once, and try to rest.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE OATH.

ON a couch, formed of such rags as they could collect in the plundered dwelling, and placed in an outer cell, the two survivors in this place of death lay down to seek the repose which both so much required. But rest, however longed for, however necessary, cannot, at all times, be commanded. The mind will not always sympathize with its grosser partner of clay, and when once unduly excited, wears out the harassed body by its morbid activity. In Hoosseïn's case, both mind and body, after their fever of constant exertion, sank into the restless lassitude of exhaustion.

In spite of all attempts at sleep, the events of the last few days continued to press upon his thoughts with painful distinctness, in the distorted imagery of a heated brain; and even when out-wearied nature did at length

give way, it was neither to sound nor refreshing repose ; for the same images continued to haunt his imagination under exaggerated forms. At one time he saw his Ausieh struggling in the hands of ruffians, while he, chained down by an invisible hand could not move a limb to her support. Again, he was watching by the couch of the dying Hadjee, when he saw the old man's exhausted frame rise from its lair, and assuming the shape of a fiend threaten him with his talons ; then changing to the likeness of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, vanish with a grin of derision.

Thus passed the night ; the fever which burned in the young man's brain increasing every hour, when, towards morning, his light and nervous slumber was disturbed by a slight noise and the approach of cautious footsteps. He woke and started up ; but the effect was mechanical, for he stared about him with the unconscious gaze of a disordered mind. The objects now impressed on his waking senses were mingled with the images of his delirious dreams ; and even the words he spoke resembled those uttered by a sleep-walker, rather than the language of a waking and rational man. They were loud enough, however, to arouse Caussim, who, starting up,

became aware of the presence of three or four persons who had entered the court unheard, and approached the chamber where they lay.

His first impulse, after calling loudly on his friend, was to search for some weapon of defence; but the first words that reached his ears from the intruders, as he collected his scattered faculties, convinced him that there was nothing to fear, for he heard his own name called in a voice which he recognised as that of one of his fellow villagers, and he exclaimed:

“Praise be to God, Yacoob! is it thou?—*Bismillah*, thou art welcome, very welcome!”

“Yacoob, it is, in truth, comrade,” replied the other; “and he blesses Allah that he finds another friend alive; but who is this with thee? and, for God’s sake, where is the Hadjee?”

“Ai Wai! alas, alas!” responded Caussim. “What is it that you ask? The good man has exchanged this world of sorrow for the joys of paradise! His body lies within there; and here—here, close beside me, is Hoosseïn Kerbelai. But what ails him, in Allah’s name? What are you about, man? What are you saying?”

It was the singular conduct, as well as the

language of the young man, that elicited these words from Caussim. Astonished at Hoossein's frantic actions and exclamations, he addressed him again and again; for under the influence of a strong delirium which presented false and fearful images to his mind, he was thundering out maledictions and threats against fancied assailants.

But it soon appeared that Hoossein neither heard nor heeded what was said, for, groping in the dark, he talked as if busily preparing for some desperate expedition; and it was only when Caussim, aided by the new comers, laid hold of him, and thus forced themselves on his notice, that he appeared to be sensible of their presence.

The torrent of abuse which he directed against imaginary ruffians, and his violent struggles, gave Caussim the first hint of the truth.

"*Penah-bur-Khodah!* he is mad—he is ill!" exclaimed he; "how his skin burns; it is fever, fatigue and distress have killed him, Ai Wahi, Ai Wahi! Think, friends, he has had neither rest nor food for these three days and nights past!"

"Allah! Allah!" echoed Yacoob in a tone of commiseration. "Poor youth, he has suf-

ferred greatly, as we all have ; and as for food, *Wullah Billah !* we do not know what it is ! There are fifty of us, men, women and children, at the back of the hill up yonder, and what have we had but a beast or two that we caught and killed ; scarcely a morsel for half of us. But what are we to do with this poor fellow ? He can't be left alone in this state ?”

The struggles of the delirious Hoossein settled that question ; the difficulty was to restrain them ; and there seemed to be nothing for it but to tie his limbs in the best manner they could, with shreds of their girdles and clothes. The means of striking a light was produced by one of the party, and a fire was soon made of scattered fragments of wood, so as not only to warm the party, but to give them light for further operations.

The appearance of the unfortunate youth, now fully seen, struck the whole party with compassion. Fierce and haggard, bearing every evidence of mental derangement ; his blood-shot eyes starting from his head, and his clothes torn and disordered with the toil of many days' hard work, as well as with his present struggles, he stood panting and violently agitated, in the hands of those who held him ; remonstrating, abusing them, as strangers, and making, every

now and then, a furious effort to free himself. In vain were their attempts to make him lie down ; he would listen to nothing.

The water vessel, which had been used for the Hadjee, stood near, an attempt on his part to lay hold of it induced them to offer it to his lips, and he drank deeply. For a moment or two, the cool beverage seemed to allay the fury of his ravings, and they got him into a recumbent position.

“Would to God, that Moollah Sâduk were here,” said Yacoob. “He is the only one who knows what should be done in such a case. What can we give him ?”

“I will tell you,” said another, after a few moments’ silence. “If we had some *teriâc* (opium) ; it quiets the restless, and sets them to sleep. I have seen his father, the Kerbelai sometimes make use of it, and the Hadjee himself used to take it.”

“Ay, Baba ! but where are we to find *teriâc* ? Allah, Allah ! How is that or any thing else to be had now, in our bankrupt village. You might as well ask for diamonds as *teriâc*.”

“Stay,” said Caussim. “The Hadjee ! Did you not say the Hadjee used it ? Who can tell but the old man, may he taste the

joys of Paradise ! may have carried it about with him."

"Barikillah ! you are right ; but how—?"

A scruple of conscience, or religion, regarding the touching of the dead body in making the search, arrested the steps of the superstitious villagers ; and there is no saying how far this unlucky fancy might have interfered with their assistance to the patient, had not Caussim, more devoted to his friend than the rest, exclaimed, "In the name of Allah, what are you thinking of? Here am I, ready to make the search. I have touched the corpse already, and am unclean. Alas ! which of us can be called clean this night?"

Rising, and taking a burning brand, he entered the inner chamber, where lay the dead, calm, and tranquil ; all unheeding the turmoil and anxiety of those, in whose griefs and cares he had so lately shared.

"In the name of the most just, and most merciful God !" ejaculated Caussim, reverently as he approached to examine the person of the deceased ; and he continued to repeat his creed, and prayers, while he went on with the search. It was not unsuccessful. In a small pocket under the left arm was discovered, along with the signet rings of the dead, a small silver

box, which on being opened, was found to contain a few small brown balls. The smell was sufficient to satisfy those, who had ever seen the drug, that this was the remedy they sought.

A discussion now arose, as to the mode and quantity to be administered ; for though acquainted by name with a substance, which is made in most parts of Persia, where the climate admits of its culture, few of these rude villagers perhaps, had ever seen the drug, and still fewer had any distinct knowledge of its powers. One gave it as his opinion, that a single little ball was sufficient ; but the man who asserted that he had seen the Hadjee use it, observed with some shrewdness, that as their object was to obtain rest and quietness for their patient, and as the old man when in his ordinary health took one ball, two could not surely be too much for a stout young man, so greatly disordered and violent as Hoossein then was.

This reasoning convinced the others, and Caussim in particular, who took upon himself the principal charge of his sick foster brother ; two pills were accordingly with some difficulty administered and washed down with another draught of cold water. Two of the men then sat down, one on either side the

patient to watch him ; while the rest stirring up their fire, conversed with Caussim about their respective adventures, and escape, and the miserable condition to which the village had been reduced by the violence it had sustained.

It appeared, that by far a greater number of those who had escaped were residents of the higher and more remote parts of the village, who hearing the noise of the attack, and the cries of those who were overtaken, had snatched up their children, and whatever else had come next to hand, and made the best of their way directly towards a hollow on the other side the mountains ; whither, on the unusual occasions of alarm, the villagers were wont to retire out of reach.

In the course of the night and subsequent day, about fifty of the survivors had collected from various hiding places ; but ignorant of the nature of the attack, and terrified lest the assailants, if agents of the government, might retain possession of the place, they would not venture back in day-light, nor was it until evening fell, that they had taken heart, and sent a party to reconnoitre and ascertain whether they could return in safety. It was this scouting party that, having examined those parts of the village in which they were more especially interested,

had ventured somewhat further, proceeded to discover if possible the fate of their old and worthy Zâbit, when they disturbed the sleepers, and found this small addition to the survivors.

The opium administered to Hoosseïn, though by unskilled hands, produced the happiest effects ; perhaps, under all circumstances, they had in their ignorance applied the best remedy for his disease. The nervous system, shaken by long continued exertion, and anxiety of mind, as well as by absolute want of sustenance, was tranquillized by the powerful influence of the narcotic ; in less than half an hour he became calm, and in a very short time, the sound sleep into which he had fallen, removed their worst apprehensions, and left them free to resume their inquiries into the condition of the place, as soon as morning should permit them to do so.

We need not accompany them in this melancholy examination, which, while it proved the predatory nature of the attack, and thus relieved them from the apprehension of supposing themselves objects of royal vengeance and consequently of extirpation, exposed at same time the vindictive character

and sanguinary dispositions of their enemies. It was clear, however, that the storm was past, and that such as had escaped its effects were safe, for the present at least, in returning to their old haunts ; accordingly one of the party proceeded to relieve the uneasiness of the other fugitives, and bring them back to the village. It was also resolved to defer the funeral of their old Zâbit, until this had been done.

Before evening, all who could be found in the neighbourhood had returned to their homes ; but of seven hundred persons, who only two days before had lain themselves to rest, the happy inhabitants of this peaceful abode, and who had been so fatally aroused, scarcely three hundred reappeared ; the rest were either cut to pieces by the swords of the marauders, or carried off to slavery, to be exposed for sale or distributed in various ways, so that there was but little prospect of their ever revisiting the scene of their nativity.

During the whole of the day and much of the subsequent night, did the sleep of Hoossein continue. The fever, which was at first perceptible in the rambling of his thoughts as he muttered in his dreams, as well as the burning heat of his skin subsided during the day. A

little dried *Mas** and water, which forms a wholesome and cooling sherbet, was procured, and given him to drink; and so salutary was the effect of this simple treatment, that, by the succeeding morning, the fever had left him, and he awoke low and exhausted, but free from disease.

That forenoon saw the remains of the venerable Zâbit borne to the ancient village burying ground, where many of his family already reposed. The ruin and destruction around imparted a tone of striking solemnity, even to the "maimed rites" with which the funeral ceremony was performed; and the dark countenance of the few survivors of his family betokened more than mere grief as they laid in the grave the revered patriarch of their line. Faint and enervated though he was, Hoossein resolved to accompany the procession. His intimacy and connexion with the Hadjee were well known; and even the sons and grandsons of the deceased made way, as, pale and haggard, scarcely able to support himself, but yet with the decided step and settled aspect of a resolved mind, the young man advanced to the brink of the grave, ere the clay cold form that

* Sour curd dried for keeping, and used with water as a beverage.

had been placed in it was covered with its kindred earth.

“May the blessing of Allah the Omnipotent and most merciful be with thee, beloved father!” he said with quivering lips, “may He grant thee a happy resting place in Paradise; and may the curse of Heaven fall with all its weight upon the heads of those who cut short thy virtuous days! Brethren and fellow countrymen, this has indeed been a day of fearful judgment! our heads are defiled with the dust of misfortune, we are broken by the rod of misery and anguish; our village is destroyed, its ruins are filled with dead, our brothers and our fathers have been slain, our women and children carried off to slavery and dishonour, and our venerable chief and father lies here a victim of the same outrage. Know ye, brethren, to whom we owe all this? Not to the displeasure of the Shah, not to the revenge or rapacity of a known enemy, but to the diabolical malice and intrigues of a villanous hypocrite, who, assuming the garb of holiness, and treacherously prostituting the name of his sovereign, came and received the hospitality of this village. His return was an attempt to dishonour and to plunder his hosts, and, baffled in this nefarious design, because we dared to pro-

tect our families and our property, he employs his ill-gotten power in this bloody and barbarous outrage, in the utter destruction of a whole village that never did him harm, but, on the contrary, received and entertained him to the best of their power, as an honoured guest!

“Brethren, we are Mussulmauns, and obey the law of our holy Prophet. We are Iraunees, tribes-men, not miserable citizens who place their necks under the foot of every court retainer; and we know how to defend our lives and properties, and to revenge an injury. The infamous perpetrator of this crime is the Sheikh-ul-Islam, of Hamadân! the blood of our relatives and friends is on his hands; and shall we not exact from him its price? For my own part, friends and comrades, single and weak as I am, I swear by the holy Kaaba, by the august head of the Prophet, and by the soul of him who now lies at our feet, that I devote myself to revenge! Never will I rest until I shall have snatched from the grasp of that miscreant the victim he has dared to drag from her home, and till his heart’s blood shall reek upon my hands, as that of my friend’s has done upon the swords of his ruffians!”

The energy of feeling which supported the

young man throughout this address, imparted to his manner an earnestness which could not fail of deeply impressing his auditors. The effect was electric, and every voice was raised to call down curses and threaten vengeance on the offender.

“This is well, friends,” responded Hoosseïn, “this is as it should be ; your indignation is well founded. But words and abuse are poor revenge, and curses are not punishment. It is to bring on his unsainted head ruin as complete and misery as bitter as he has inflicted upon us, that I now devote myself ; and, Inshallah, weak as I yet am, there shall be no delay. Who is there that will join me ? who is there that will pledge himself to aid me in pursuing the murderer to the ends of the earth ? For I swear, that, go where he will, and be he where he may, in the highway, or in the harem, in the court of justice, or the Mosque, in the sanctuary itself, ay, or in the presence of his sovereign, my hand will neither spare nor falter, but come what may, I will strike home.”

A pause of some moments succeeded this second appeal. It was broken by Caussim, who, stepping forward, took his foster-brother's hand in both of his own, and kissing it, said—

“In the name of the most merciful Allah ! I swear to accompany thee, Hoossein !”

“And I,” “and I,” exclaimed several others of the young men, doing the like. “We swear to join thee, and aid thee in compassing revenge !”

“It is well,” replied Hoossein, emphatically. “You have sworn in the presence of God and men, and, *Inshallah*, the day may come when I shall call on you to remember this oath. And now, Bismillah ! let all be concluded. May God pardon thy sins, thou good old man, and give thee a place of happy rest !”

Exhausted by his own energy, the young man faltered as he ceased, and staggering backwards, fell into the arms of those around, who bore him from the burying ground to the nearest place of shelter.

On the following day, the party was increased by the return of the delegates from Ispahan, who, little dreaming of the desolation which was to greet them, had come on at an easy pace, bearing with them the ineffectual forgiveness and assurance of the protection of the Shah. Their arrival only added to the wretchedness they found, for each had to hear the sad recital of his individual losses, in addition to the general ruin ; and melancholy indeed were the

occupations of the next few days, every hour bringing to notice some new object of distress, as they gradually removed from the wreck of the village the traces of slaughter and devastation with which it had been encumbered.

On such scenes it were painful to dwell; nor need we endeavour to paint the anguish of Hoossein, as confined by the effects of illness to his miserable couch, he brooded over his misfortune, and fretted at the weakness which withheld him from following and seeking deadly revenge upon its author.

CHAPTER XII.

A JOURNEY IN QUEST OF VENGEANCE.

SOME days after the scenes we have described, Kerbelai Hussun, and the Mushe-dee, with some others of the remaining heads of families, were seated in a dilapidated apartment, of the ruined house of the former. Below them sat Hoossein, still pale and emaciated, but free from illness, strong in mental energy, if not in physical power, and burning to commence his enterprise. Around him was a group of younger men, whose excited countenances betokened the deep indignation that still agitated their hearts. The subject, which occupied their attention, was that absorbing one, which every glance around served to recall; for where could they cast their eyes, without being reminded of their recent misfortune? The immediate object of their deliberations was to seek the means of repairing it

as far as possible, and of recovering such of their lost associates, as might yet be alive.

“It is certain, from all we can gather,” observed the Kerbelai, “that though the Sheikh-ul-Islam was at the bottom of this affair, and that many of his paid servants were engaged in it, there must still have been a large force of these Eeliauts to help them. The pillage of all portable property confirms the reports of those who saw, and knew them, even amidst the darkness and the tumult. Now as these fellows seek only for plunder and gain, the captives, they spared, have assuredly been reserved for sale, and no doubt, might be ransomed, did we only know where to find them.”

“There is no doubt of that,” replied the Mushedee, who was himself not unacquainted with similar transactions, in former days; “and I am of opinion that Hamadân and Kermanshah, are the places whither they will be carried. The robbers would scarcely take them to Ispahan, where they would be likely to meet some of our own people, or chiefs; and, thanks be to God, bad as the times are, we have not yet come to catching Mussulmauns in the next village, and selling them publicly in the market place. No, Hamadân and Ker-

manshah are far away ; the news of this chup-pow will not reach them in a hurry, and the Turks of Baghdad, are fond of slaves from Louristan."

"And are we not Mussulmauns, then?" demanded an old man, who had his head bound up, in consequence of a wound. "By the death of my son, if they sell us not, they do worse ! What are we to say, when priests and Moollahs, to gratify their own lust, send thieves and Gholaums to cut the Ryots' throats ? There was my poor old wife ; she was not worth their pains, so one cut her down at my side, and another ran at me spear in hand ; thanks be to Allah, my good felt cap half turned the thrust, or I should have been killed, as the villain, no doubt, thought I was."

"Ay, Baba Tekee, you have lost your old woman, no doubt ; but think of me for a wretch ! two as fine young girls, as ever father had—scarcely yet women ; one cut down in my sight ; the other carried off, and no one to help the poor things ! Allah ! Allah !"

"Ai Wai, Ai Wai ! for my poor little grandchildren," wailed an aged man. "Dead or alive, I shall never see their sweet and cheerful faces more ! God knows what has become of them !"

“ And my brother, Rujub, who lived at the point there,” interrupted another, “ gone with all his family ! Some murdered, some carried off ; not one left ! Oh ! my curses on the ruffians !”

“ Ay, my dear friends ! God knows we have all had our share of loss and misery,” said the Kerbelai, in reply to the groans and complaints, that were poured out by every one around him ; “ but what has been done, cannot be undone. Who can restore life to the corse that now sleeps in the grave ? It is of the living we must think now, not of the dead ; the living, who are weeping and crying out for our aid, and who may be restored to us, if we go rightly about the business ; and I can imagine no plan better than that which has just been proposed to us. It is my son, my unfortunate son, who has lost his betrothed wife, the sweetest flower of all we have to lament, it is he who proposes it. He will proceed with some companions to Hamadân, and there make strict, but cautious inquiry, and act according to what he hears. Who can tell what blessing may attend their efforts, and enable them to discover and bring back our lost ones ?”

“ Inshallah ! Inshallah !” exclaimed most of the assembly. But there were some, whose

gloomy countenances betrayed that the means proposed did not reach the sore, which rankled in their bosoms. "Ay, such measures may do well for those who have a hope of recovering their lost ones," said one, shaking his head; "but what shall those say, who have no such hope? When the thread of life has been cut, what is then to be the remedy?"

"What but blood for blood," said a fierce old man, who with his keen eye, glancing at each speaker in succession, had silently listened to the rapid flow of opinion and complaint. "Comrades, to him who has lost such a son, as I have;—the sole hope and support of my life, the only one to keep my lamp burning, when I am gone; what is there left, but blood and vengeance?"

"Alas! were that all," replied an elderly and grizzled man, a son of the deceased Zâbit. "Say, brethren, which of you have greater cause for grief, or for revenge, than I, who now sit here. On whom has this blow fallen more heavily? On the eve of this calamity, the family I belong to could number full fifty souls, with the good old man at their head, whom ye so lately laid in the earth;—where are they now? Of my own large household, but two remain to me, and of the rest, who

shall tell how many are dead—murdered; how many may be dragged into captivity? Willingly would I have blood for blood; but, oh! how far more earnestly do I long to see some of my beloved ones, if any do remain, once more around me; even in the ruined shed which now would be their only shelter! Well, did I know the handsome youth, whom Baba Abdoolla deplores—a fairer and a sweeter, never gave delight to a parent; but, alas! he is gone; and vengeance, however sweet, can never restore the dead. Then, brethren, how is revenge to be had? Let Baba Abdoolla, or any man point out, and I, for one, am ready to do my best to obtain it. But if he can point out no means; if we cannot even approach our enemies, and are too weak to face them if we could, why should we not at least do our best for those of our own blood who survive, and endeavour to restore them to their families? The proposal of Hoosseïn Kerbelai appears to me most worthy of adoption, and we owe him our thanks for the part he has offered to take in it.”

“*Afereen!* be it adopted. Bismillah! let Hoosseïn Kerbelai depart, and let those, whose wives and children he brings back with him, give him their thanks. For my part, when he

brings me on his hands the blood of these miscreants, whether priests or robbers, I, Baba Abdoolla, will lick it off them, and lay my old head at his feet."

With these words the old man rose and quitted the assembly, which soon came to the resolution of accepting the offer of Hoossein's services; and the young man was empowered to make such preparations, as he might think expedient for his enterprise. These were few and simple. Assembling his younger companions, who had sworn to assist him in pursuit of their enemies; he told them that, for the present, he should not require their company, as it would be by no means prudent to attract attention to their measures; and the inquiries, which were necessary, before deciding on any course, must be made in secrecy and silence.

"Caussim and myself," he said, "will first set out alone; but be ye all prepared, for ye may be summoned when ye least expect it; and then—remember your oaths."

Arrayed in their customary peasant's garb, and armed as usual, slenderly provided with money, or means of any sort, and taking but a single ass to carry their little packet of necessities or themselves by turns in case of illness or fatigue, did Hoossein and his foster-brother

once more quit their village together—alas! under what different feelings from the day when the young man set forth upon his first journey, and made his first great step in life, accompanied by his mother, on his way to Booroojird.

But the remembrance of these happy times, though it awakened a pang in his soul, served but to confirm his constancy and fortitude; for as he thought of all he had lost since that day, and of the terrible circumstances that aggravated his misfortune, his blood boiled with indignation and anguish, and the hard-set teeth and frowning brow gave token of the desperate resolution which nerved his soul.

It seemed too as if motion and exertion, instead of being injurious, were all that were necessary for restoring his former health and strength; for, so far was he from suffering from fatigue, that his foster brother could with difficulty restrain within moderate bounds his impatience to get forward; and each day seemed to add alike to his eagerness and his powers of endurance. Every inquiry made in the neighbourhood of the village had failed of eliciting any information to be relied upon, as to the route taken by the marauders in their retreat.

That some of them had gone down the valley

was certain; but in what numbers, or whether in charge of prisoners or no, was unknown; while that the greater number had retreated across the mountains, to the south-west, appeared beyond a doubt, not only from the report of the surviving villagers, who had recognised the robbers, but from their broad track strewn with fragments and tokens of depredation and haste. Amongst these was an unfortunate wretch, who, wounded and disabled, had dropped on the way dead, as the ruffians believed, but who, when discovered, had still strength enough left to tell what had happened to him.

Thus baffled, Hoosseïn and his comrade, convinced that no good end was to be gained by taking the high road so near home, resolved to keep the mountain track for a time, and leaving upon their left the well-known plain of Booroojird, to strike into the great route near Hissar. From thence, so urgently did they press on, that late on the evening of the third day they entered the city of Hamadân, which for several hours they had descried nestling at the foot of the lofty Elwund, and overlooking the magnificent extent of its own fertile plain dotted with thriving villages. Threading the crowded bazaars, too much

fatigued and preoccupied to make any remarks on what they contained, they proceeded to a small caravanserai frequented chiefly by muleteers and persons of inferior rank, where, after a frugal meal, they soon sought repose.

In the morning their first care was to perambulate the bazaars and public places, not indeed with any fixed purpose or distinct hope of a result favourable to their object, but rather to look about them, and take their chance of what might occur. Nor was their walk, as it happened, devoid of incident; for, on turning from the chief bazaar into a street which crossed it, the two comrades were arrested in their course by the passage of a large cavalcade. A band of half a dozen furoshes went first, clearing the way with their sticks and “ser-hissâbs,” striking to right and left without respect of persons, and followed by two mounted servants. After these, upon a fine white mule, came a tall important personage, clad in white, and wearing a huge green shawl turban.

A single glance sufficed to inform Hoossein that this was the Sheikh-ul-Islam himself. He was followed by a number of priests and Moolahs, and the people as he passed besought his blessing with many and noisy solicitations. The proud hypocrite himself moved on with

eyes either fastened on the earth, or directed forwards in the aimless gaze of abstraction; but Hoossein, who, after the first shock of surprise, watched him narrowly, could detect furtive sidelong glances issuing from beneath the downcast lids, which left nothing unobserved or unscanned. He even conceived that one of these searching glances lighted upon his own person; but ere he could fix it, the cold look of mental absence had succeeded, and the priest moved steadily on till beyond his line of vision.

While still musing on this occurrence, and mechanically striving to pass through the crowd of menials that formed the train of the reverend personage, Hoossein found himself confronted by another person, who appeared to be observing him with suspicious attention. So close a scrutiny provoked an equally curious examination on the part of the young man, in his turn. Of the face, it occurred to Hoossein, that he had some faint recollection, although he could not determine where he had seen it, or with what place or circumstances it was in any way associated; and in another moment the stranger passed on amidst the crowd.

That the young man should feel his blood boil in his veins at the sight of his mortal foe,

and should experience a strong touch of the thirst for revenge which burned like a fever in his soul, is not to be doubted; but not even a moment's reflection was required to convince him, that this was neither the time nor the place for seeking to perform his vow, or for promoting the objects of his mission; and that, on the contrary, an attempt on the Sheikh-ul-Islam's life, should it even be crowned with success, might rather prove adverse to his hopes of recovering Ausieh and redeeming the captives whose relatives had confided in his judgment and discretion, as well as in his courage, than it could in any degree promote the end he had in view.

"That fellow cast a good look at you; he will know you again surely," said Caussim, as Hoossein stood, fixed in thought, revolving these considerations. "Do you know who he is?"

"I do not. Some insolent official of that unsainted scoundrel! You recognised him surely."

"Who?—what?"

"The Sheikh-ul-Islam."

"Penah-bur-khodah! if *we* should be recognised by *him*!"

"Little fear of that! What should so powerful a miscreant imagine he could have to dread

from mere worms like us, miserable villagers, and in his own castle too? He never will dream of our daring to follow him here. He must feel our sting before he can suspect it to be near him. But, come, let us examine the caravanserais, and try what luck they may bring us."

The examination proved fruitless. Nothing which they saw suggested even matter for inquiry, and Hoossein was too apprehensive of arousing suspicion to put any question in conversation, which did not naturally spring from the subject of discourse.

Returning homewards, as they passed by a ruinous tomb near the mausoleum of the celebrated Mordecai and Esther, the attention of Hoossein was drawn to a group of three persons engaged, as it seemed, in conversation, two of whom wore the tattered garments and peculiar caps of fakeers or dervishes, while the other exhibited an appearance which caused the young man to stop and gaze with awakened interest. Could he be right? was it possible that this was his old friend Allee Neemroo, come to greet him in Hamadân?

With the joy of excited hope, for who was there more likely than Allee to assist and advise him to good purposes? he instantly

sprung forward to accost him, calling, at the same time, on him by name; but just then the three persons got into motion and entered the ruin. Hoossein immediately followed, but the glance which he cast around, as he reached the interior, to his astonishment, lighted on nothing but the walls of the ruin. Their disappearance seemed like magic, and he rubbed his eyes in amazement and doubt. There was, it is true, another archway opposite, but though an open space of some extent appeared beyond it, there was no one to be seen, although it seemed impossible that the persons whom he sought to overtake could have left the ruin by any other way.

After a moment of hesitation, the young man repeated his summons, calling on his friend to come forth; but no reply was given.

“In the name of Allah! what can this mean?” said he; “surely my eyes did not deceive me? I am broad awake, and Allee it certainly was; and even had it not been he, it is certain that three men entered this place, and what has become of them?”

“Allah, Allah!” exclaimed the superstitious Caussim, “it is *Jádoogeeree*! (witchcraft.) There is *chymia* here, or worse; for the sake of Allah go no further. These were no men;

they were Ghôls. See, this is a tomb. They were demons who desire to devour us. In the name of the prophet, let us quit the place !”

But Hoosseïn was still rapt in his own musings. That the man he had seen was, in truth, Allee Neemroo, he felt almost convinced, nor was he less so, that whoever he might be, he had seen himself and his companion approaching; nay, that this approach had been the cause of their retreat. Yet why, if it were his old friend, should such have been the case? It was a question to which his reason could suggest no satisfactory reply. But two things at least were certain; the one, that if Allee really had a reason for avoiding him, as his conduct seemed to imply, it was useless to attempt pursuit; and secondly, that if he really were in Hamadân, there was little doubt of meeting him again, unless these reasons were so cogent as to induce him to withdraw altogether, in which case pursuit would be equally vain.

Perplexed and disappointed, though not despairing, he cast another glance round the ruin, and then, yielding to the urgent remonstrances of Caussim, left the place and retired with him to their munzil.

Night closed in after a day passed in fruitless

wanderings, and the two companions, after a simple repast, were seated over the embers of the fire which had served to cook their food, enjoying the comfort of a rude pipe, when a figure appeared at the door of the room, and, entering with the usual salute, advanced, while Hoossein was about returning it, and, without waiting for invitation or welcome, seated himself before the fire, and shading his face from its glare, poured forth, with rapid utterance, a string of the complimentary expressions, customary on the meeting of common acquaintances.

“Cold night, Agas,” he continued, spreading his hands over the glowing embers; “wonderful tobacco that must be of yours! What a perfume it has! Sheeranzees, no doubt! Here is some from Tubbus, excellent; try a little of it, pray. By your leave, permit me,” and taking the pipe from the hand of the staring Caussim, after smoking some half a dozen pulls, as if to exhaust it, he began, very gravely, to knock out the remainder, and, pulling out a bag from the bosom of his dress, set about refilling the top or bowl of the pipe.

In the meantime, Hoossein, desirous to see something more of the intruder, threw upon the red embers a handful of dried weeds, which, soon blazing up, threw a bright light

over the apartment and its inmates. He now saw that the new comer was a man of middle size, dressed much in the style of an humble retainer of the great, and marked by an air of easy reckless assurance, not likely to be readily abashed.

The familiar volubility of his address rendered all reply on the part of Hoossein and his companion unnecessary, as it seemed, if not impossible; and the young man, unwilling to be rash or inhospitable, contented himself for a while with scrutinizing the stranger, whose features, though in no wise remarkable, and, at that time, distorted a good deal by the glare of light, seemed not absolutely unfamiliar to him.

“And whence came you, Agas? Newly arrived I see! From Ispahan? or Kermanshah, perhaps, or from the north? How have you found the roads? Dangerous times for travellers these; thieves and robbers thick as grasshoppers; and as for protection, how should we find the ways safe when the King’s servants and the *Rah-dars** themselves take to plundering?”

And pray, Aga,” said Hoossein, “give me leave to inquire to whom we are indebted for

* Guards of the road, police.

this visit? As for us, you are right in supposing us strangers in Hamadân, and you will excuse our wish to know who asks these questions before we reply to them.”

“La-illah-il-ullah ! how prudent you are ! Have ye been stealing jewels, that ye are so apprehensive ? Why, what should you have to fear from honest Meer Mustapha, whom every one, from the Governor and the Sheikh-ul-Islam to any shop-keeper in the bazaar, knows for a good-natured, gossiping soul, who delights in getting and giving news ? Ask any *Dullák* or *Hummamchee** in the city who I am, and he will tell you that I am an honest fellow, who loves a good pipe, a good pillaw, a measure of good wine, and a good soul or two to drink it with. Allah-il-ullah ! afraid of Meer Mustapha ! Here, Aga, the pipe is ready now. Taste my tobacco !”

But Hoossein liked his guest too little to relish such familiarity ; so he gently put aside the pipe, which was handed to Caussim, and he, taking it mechanically, began to smoke.

“And so, Aga, you are from Ispahan ?” continued Meer Mustapha. “Strange doings there they say ; all mad or stupid ! The King

* Attendants in the baths, barbers.

mad about religion; the Moollahs mad for power; the nobles for plunder; the people wild to get rid of them altogether, and the government so stupid as not to see that the country is going head long to the devil, or to the Affghans! Eh?—is it not so?”

“How should I know, Aga?” replied Hoossein, who, though half amused by his visitor’s volubility, was still reluctant to give him any encouragement; “we are but Ryots, villagers; what should we have to do with the court or the government?”

“Hah! Barikillah! to be sure, well answered, no doubt! But the government will sometimes have to do with you; too much indeed, is it not so? hard hearted wretches, eh? How they do work these poor Ryots! Taxes here, soorsaut there, demands for the troops, demands for royal guests; squeezing, cheating, extorting, ay, and sometimes worse! God knows what is often done by haughty Khans and greedy officials! And then the plundering Eeliaut! always at some mischief! They say there have been some desperate chuppows committed of late. Heard ye of any as ye came along?” As he said these words, he cast a piercing look at the young man, who on

his part had sat gazing at the stranger in no small perplexity.

But his last words cast a sudden light on Hoossein's mind. The intruder before him, and the man in the priest's train, whose remarkable scrutiny had fixed his attention as he passed, were one and the same; and, he now felt assured, he was no other than one of that same priest's attendants on his memorable visit to the village. He was then recognised, recognised as one of those villagers, who had incurred the deadly vengeance of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and that too in his own city, and by one of his own retainers. It was, he felt, a predicament of much peril; but it was fortunate that the conviction had come in time to prevent his being entrapped into a confidence, which it doubtless was the stranger's object to effect, in order to ascertain the nature of his views in Hamadân.

His mouth was now sealed, and the stranger soon discovered, that though the young man became if anything less silent, he was in no degree more communicative. Once more he pressed on him the pipe, which Hoossein again declined. He professed his friendship, and offered his assistance as guide through Ha-

madân, assuring him that he should call upon him early on the morrow, for the purpose of pointing out what was best worthy of notice. He even commenced an account of the city and its wonders; but finding that instead of commanding more attention, his auditor withdrew still more from the discourse, he at length rose and took his leave.

As the stranger left the cell, Hoosseïn turned to Caussim, and addressed to him some remark on what had passed, when receiving no reply, and observing no sign of sympathy or intelligence in return, he looked more narrowly, and discovered that the poor fellow had fallen into a deep sleep where he sat. This it is true might be the effect of fatigue or accident; but there was something in his attitude, which struck him with surprise and alarm. Nor was this feeling diminished when he found that all his efforts to awaken him were unavailing.

What could have occasioned so deep, so unnatural a slumber? could it be the effect of treachery—of evil design? a thought flashed on his mind. The pipe! the Tubbus tobacco! so strongly pressed on his acceptance by the stranger, that pipe must have been drugged; and taking it up from beside the fire place, where it still lay, he eagerly examined it; the

smell was sufficient, it was impure tobacco ; opium, if not other drugs had been mingled with it in the pipe, and Hoossein then recollected that the stranger, though he had smoked what remained of their tobacco, had scarcely put his lips to the pipe, when charged with his own. The fact then was clear, the stranger was not only a treacherous emissary of the Sheikh's, but had come with intent to perpetrate immediate mischief, perhaps to murder them when disabled by the effects of the drug. Thus, danger the most imminent was at their very door.

While meditating on this startling conviction, and considering how best to extricate himself, and his unlucky comrade from this state of peril, Hoossein was startled by the appearance of another figure in the doorway ; and, impressed with the belief that this must be his enemy returned to complete his work, he started up and assumed an attitude of defence. But the aspect of the new intruder, as soon as rendered visible by the flashing light of the fire, allayed his first suspicions, and he remained as he stood, expecting what further was to happen.

His visitant was a man habited as a dervish, or religious mendicant, whose head was covered

only with a mass of his own coarse unmatted hair, hanging down in most unseemly confusion on all sides except in front, where it was parted a little; he had, too, a glittering coal black eye that ranged in all directions. A tattered cloth was wrapped around his loins, and, fastened by a thong over the left shoulder. Down his back hung the skin of a wolf, the head and grinning jaws being reverted between the shoulders. His bare limbs as well as his breast and cheeks were covered with ashes; and in addition to a drinking vessel of wood, and a pair of iron tongs thrust into his girdle of hair rope, he carried in his hand a stout stick, the butt end of which was loaded with iron rings, while the top was shod with a spear head of steel.

Leaning on his armed club, this uncouth apparition addressed the young man in harsh and guttural tones:

“If Hoossein of Ameenabâd would shun destruction, and hear what he seeks to know, let him instantly arise and follow this guide.”

Still more astonished at this singular address and recognition, which implied not only that his person, but his business was known to the speaker, and rendered doubly suspiciously what

had already occurred that night, Hoossein paused for a moment.

“And who mayest thou be,” he said, at length, “who seemest to know me so well?”

“A worm of clay : further it imports thee not to know. If Hoossein of Ameenabâd would preserve his own life, and that of his comrade, let him lose not a moment more, but follow his guide.”

“How can I follow till I know who leads ? How can I confide in one, who may, for aught I know, be an enemy come to guide me to the destruction he warns me to avoid. I must know more before I follow thee.”

“There is nought for thee to know : like thee, this worm is a creature of Allah’s ; let that suffice, Hoossein of Ameenabâd,” continued he, in a still harsher tone, and striking the butt end of his spear upon the floor of the cell, “if thou wouldst meet him whom thou didst this day see in the tomb, follow this servant of Allah.”

“Is it possible?” ejaculated Hoossein, as the remembrance of the scene at the ruin flashed on his mind, and seemed to dissipate somewhat of the mystery in which he found himself involved, “art thou indeed a messenger from *him* ?”

“Thou hast said it: follow!” and he turned at once to go.

“Stay; I cannot leave my comrade here in this state. Thou spokest even now of our avoiding death; it may be still nearer than thou thinkest. The enemy has been already here; and see his traces, see the condition of my friend. If left here, he is lost;” and Hoossein gave a rapid account of what had happened.

On hearing this, without uttering a word, the Dervish drew from some secret crypt among his rags a small box of white metal, and opening it he held it to the sleeper’s nose. The effect was immediate. He sneezed twice or thrice with violence; in a few seconds more, the pungent essence operated still more powerfully, for he drew back his head, writhed for a while, and finally opening his eyes, stared wildly around him.

“Yah, Hyder!” ejaculated the Dervish; “let us depart, there is no time to lose.”

That this was true, Hoossein was not disposed to deny; so hastily tying up their little bundle of necessities, and catching up their arms, he seized the arm of Caussim, while the Dervish took the other, and thus they quitted the cell.

“ Hold him here for a moment,” said the youth, “ while I fetch the ass.”

“ If thou art not worse than an ass, thou wilt tarry no longer ; is the ass worth thy life ?” said the Dervish.

Hoossein said no more ; he felt that there was but one course to take. He was in the toils, and moving by his own judgment, might from his own ignorance, prove fatal. He considered that the Dervish could scarcely, by any human means, be aware of his name or acquaintance with Allee Neemroo, except by the information of that personage himself, whom, of all others, he desired, at this time, to meet and consult. By following the Dervish, therefore, he pursued the course that promised best for safety ; and thus resolved, he continued, still holding his comrade’s arm, and still upon his guard, to accompany his singular and silent guide.

The fresh air acted beneficially upon the intoxicated Caussim, insomuch that, with the assistance of his supporters, he was able to proceed, although still like a man who walks in sleep, insensible to things around him. The Dervish leaving the more open bazaar, where stood the caravanserai, soon plunged into a narrow and crooked lane, where the closeness

of the wall on either side, added to the gloom of the night, produced an almost utter darkness. Stumbling over the numerous obstructions that occurred in this winding-path, as they passed from one lane to another, the party advanced but slowly for a considerable time; here climbing over ruins; there groping through hollows that appeared to lead entirely underground; until after more than an hour of such fatiguing progress, they found themselves beyond the precincts of the town; after which they pursued a road confined between high mud walls, above which rustled the now sere foliage of the orchard trees.

More than once had Hoosseïn thought of questioning his guide; and painful suspicions crossed his mind as they left abodes of men behind, and he felt himself, more and more, in the power of the mysterious mendicant, who still, silently, but unremittingly kept on his course. But the reasoning which had, at first, induced him to commit himself to his guidance, remained unchanged, and as the guide himself persevered in rigid silence, he felt no disposition to break it, upon any other account.

Caussim, in the meantime, gradually shook

off the lethargic influence which had so effectually overpowered him; and his revival to consciousness was signified by a frequent emission of such sounds as men send forth on awakening from the effects of a debauch. To these succeeded semi-articulate remonstrances, accompanied by attempts to stop and free himself from his supporters. To these the Dervish paid no regard, until the poor man's complaints became more noisy, on which, shaking the arm he held, he exclaimed in a deep, but subdued tone :

“ If you love your life, be silent, and come on.”

And Hoosseïn, who had not as yet interfered, called emphatically on Caussim to cease such resistance, and proceed without noise, trusting to his guidance. The voice of Hoosseïn produced its customary effect; and Caussim went on peaceably enough, for a considerable time, until his patience being worn out, he again stood still, and exclaimed :

“ In the name of Allah ! what are you about ? Whither are we going ?”

Hoosseïn, whose anxiety had been fast increasing, until, at length, it became uncontrollable, could not now refrain from answering his comrade,

“To tell the truth, Caussim, I cannot answer thee. Tell us, thou nameless guide, whom we have followed so long,” added he, also stopping short, “whither art thou conducting us? Speak: for further I go not, until I know from thee more than thou hast yet deigned to say.”

“Obstinate man! thou hast heard the message which this servant of Allah was charged to deliver thee; thou hast found thyself in peril, and deliverance is offered thee by a sign which thou canst not but confide in. Yet still thou dost hesitate, when a few paces more will tell thee all that is to be known. Behold, the spot is at hand.”

Thus encouraged, Hoosseïn again moved on; and in a few minutes the guide, turning to the left, entered a gap in a ruinous wall, and having advanced by a winding track, among objects which were but faintly discernible in the darkness, he uttered a low howl, which, in a few seconds, met with a response like its own echo.

A few steps more among still larger masses, which were obviously the ruins of old walls, brought the party to the mouth of an arched hollow, in which at some distance, onwards, sparkled a faint light. This was evidently the termination of their journey, for the guide made

straight for this cavern ; and Hoossein grasping his staff, while still holding the arm of Causim, prepared himself for the event, with a heart which beat even more with excitement than with apprehension.

The light was held by a figure somewhat resembling their guide, who, when he saw them approaching, turned short, and standing before a screen of ragged mat, held it to one side, and discovered to them an arched doorway, which he beckoned them to enter. Hoossein followed the guide. The light within proceeding chiefly from a blaze of dried brushwood, dazzled his eyes for a few moments, but when he could distinguish objects, they fell upon a group of figures, all, except one, wearing the dress of religious mendicants and Dervishes ; and in that one, he readily recognised the person of Allee Neemroo.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BUST OF ELWUND.

A SINCERE and grateful, though subdued, Alhamdulillah ! burst from the lips of Hoossein at the most acceptable sight of his friend ; nor was he, perhaps, aware how great was the weight taken from his heart, until thus assured of the fidelity of his guide, and the safety of his companion and himself ; for, with Allee he did truly feel all the confidence of security. There dwelt, in fact, in this singular personage, notwithstanding the humbleness of his station, an influence, of which Hoossein had from the first been conscious, and which was exercised, as he himself had found occasion to remark, pretty widely in a sphere far higher than his own.

It was the experience of this inexplicable power over others, not less than its mysterious influence over his own mind, and his experience, too, of Allee's unswerving faithfulness to his word, and to those whom he treated as

his friends, that now inspired him with this confidence ; and that gave him an internal conviction not only that he himself was safe, but that, however unaccountable some parts of his conduct might appear, through Allee he should probably effect the objects of his journey.

It required, indeed, no small exercise of this confidence to support in the young man this opinion of his friend, and to preserve his feeling of security during the scene which he now witnessed, at his reception by Allee himself.

The figures he had seen were seated in various attitudes and at various distances around the fire, which burned in the centre of the place. They all were motionless and silent ; and when Hoosseïn approached, Allee Neemroo was the only one who addressed to him the customary words of welcome ; and this he did in tones of more than usual solemnity, and without even rising to receive him. He pointed, it is true, to a seat beside him, but spoke not another word, nor evinced the smallest symptom of cordiality. On the contrary, his aspect was cold and severe, and he maintained an abstracted reserve, that might have led Hoosseïn to imagine that he had been brought before a conclave of stern, unfeeling judges, rather than into an assembly of persons from whom he

might hope to experience the offices of friendship. Fresh fuel was thrown upon the fire, and a *nargilleh*, or water-pipe of cocoa-nut, was offered him; but no word was spoken, save when some individual in the depth of his abstraction intonated, in hollow sounds, the mysterious monosyllable, "*Hak !*" followed up, perchance, by an equally deep "*Yah-ullah !*" or "*Yah Hyder !*" and then relapsed into silence.

Hoossein had heard more than he had seen of Dervishes Calunders and Fakeers. They came occasionally to the village, it is true, and he had seen them frequently enough in the bazaars of Booroojird, and other towns; but never before had he been present in one of their assemblies, nor observed them in their moods of contemplative abstraction.

Thus he sat among them discomfited and perplexed, if not alarmed, until, after a weary time, the pipe, which had circulated rapidly during the silence, being exhausted, as it seemed, an old man, whose white beard hung down over his emaciated chest and withered shoulders, rose up with an unearthly sound, which Hoossein could not interpret, and was followed by the fraternity, who, one after another withdrew, until Allee Neemroo, him-

self, and his foster-brother alone remained in the vault.

With the departure of the Fakeers, the manner and aspect of Allee changed from his cold and abstracted air, to one of cordial, yet not undignified kindness.

“And now, Hoossein of Ameenabâd,” said he, “thou art welcome, truly welcome. It is long, indeed, since we have met, and thou hast been looked for, friend. Ay, I have waited for thee anxiously.”

“Waited for me, Allee? *I* looked for here? In the name of Allah, what mean you? What reason could you have to expect me?”

“Is it my custom, then, to lose sight of my friends? was I likely to abandon *you* among them all? The value of friendship is known in adversity; in prosperity, true friends may remain apart; but when evil days come, it is then they should be together. Thinkest thou I have forgotten thee, though thou hast not seen me? Thinkest thou that I am ignorant of all that has befallen thee? that I know not what has brought thee hither?”

“You know it?”

“Assuredly; and being aware not only of your misfortune, but of its author; and know-

ing, too, your warm and hasty temper, can you wonder that I should anticipate your arrival here, so soon as that author should become revealed to you? But I had other and more especial tidings of your proceedings and intentions; and here accordingly you are, though later by some days than I looked for."

"Strange!" said Hoossein musing, "yet my project was known but to few; and Ameenabâd is distant! You know then my object in coming hither?"

"I do, but you have erred. What you chiefly seek is not here, while like a hot and inexperienced hunter, you yourself run into the lion's jaws."

"Allah! not here! is this possible? how know you this? Then, where must she be sought?"

"How it becomes known to me needs not be explained. My words to you have hitherto proved true; and what I now assert is, therefore, worthy of credit. The maiden you seek is not in Hamadân; where she is, please God, shall soon become known. But is she the only object of the deputed agent of Ameenabâd? Has Hoossein forgot the friends who have confided in his zeal and judgment, who trust to his pledged word?"

Hoossein hung his head.

“It is true I am to blame. I was selfish, for I have thought more of my own interests than of those of my friends. Yet, Allah ! Allah ! could I help it ? Oh, Allee, had you but known her ! Could I but know where she is ; that she, the very core of my heart, is safe ! Yet it is some consolation to think that she is not in *his* hands ! Would to God, I could know she was not in his *power* ! Worse could not befall her ! Oh ! counsel me, dear friend ! Often have you aided me, when sore beset ; and now your assistance is more needful than ever ! Say, what must I do ?”

“At present nothing. Your rashness has already almost destroyed you ; I would have prevented this wild step, but my warning has been baffled by your own irregular movements. Think you that the Sheikh-ul-Islam has but two eyes ? that those he hates or dreads can enter his own strongholds unknown to him ? Be undeceived in regard to his character. He, as well as I, knew or guessed that you were coming hither ; that he discovered you had reached Hamadân, you yourself have cause to believe. He has discovered you, and has prepared to dispose of you. Others, as well as I, can command secret intelligence.”

“Ay, no doubt, great is his power, and

strong his will to do evil. Remorseless villain ! little mercy have I, or any of us, to expect at his hands ! My informant at Ispahan, a former servant of his, warned me that he never abandoned an object once aimed at, and never forgave an enemy !”

“ He told you the truth ; he is as resolute as remorseless. Had the Sheikh-ul-Islam been a monarch, and his prudence and judgment equalled his firmness and will, he would have been a world-subduer. But Allah has denied him these qualities, as well as truth and mercy, and thus he sometimes overshoots his mark.”

“ Inshallah ! he will do so now ; if not, God help the virtuous and innocent in his power ! But, if not rescued, they may at least be revenged ; and my oath to have blood for blood is before the footstool of Allah !”

“ Little would oath or efforts avail you unassisted, for your steps are beset with snares which all your vigilance and activity would not serve you to shun ; even now you were rushing into a trap, from which nothing but the means that have been taken by others could have saved you. But say, what was it precisely that you hoped from the step you have taken ? having run straight into the wolf’s den, what was to be the next measure ?”

“By your own head, I cannot tell! I should have trusted to circumstances to guide me. Knowing that the Sheikh-ul-Islam was at the bottom of the affair, it appeared to me and to others that where he was, there was most chance of learning what I wished to know. We thought too that the captives from our village would probably be carried hither, and *she* above them all. I trusted that cautious inquiry and vigilant attention must in the end succeed.”

“La-illah-il-ullah! So you thought that the Sheikh-ul-Islam, because he connived at, or even contrived, a chuppow for his private ends, would turn open man-seller in his own home, in the seat of his own religious sway, or would suffer his agents to bring thither their captives for sale! This is your shrewdness and judgment; it is of a piece with your prudence; yet with this you hope to outwit the devil himself. Little truly do you know whom you have to deal with! As for her to whom you have alluded, and who, to speak truth, is the great cause of your coming hither, though in that hope you were better supported by probabilities, even there his calculating foresight may have been employed to throw you off the true scent by pursuing measures the reverse of

what you deemed so certain. At all events, *she* is not here; and as for other captives from Ameenabâd, man, woman, or child, you might as well look for pearls on the highway as for one of them in Hamadân."

"It is true, it is obvious," replied Hoossein abashed. "No doubt you are right, and I as well as others are but fools! Yet, after all, what was there to be done? no other course presented itself to our minds; and, by your own soul, I could not rest without attempting something; my very head was burning, my brain was dried up!"

"Poor boy! so indeed it would appear. But take heart: it has pleased the Omnipotent to send those to your aid who have cooler heads and more knowledge of the world, and their counsel must for the present guide you. That your life is in danger you have discovered already; you shall now be placed in security; and so placed, must patiently remain until it be judged safe for you to move, or until circumstances may transpire to direct your efforts with some chance of success. In the mean time, take one caution from myself: whatever you may hear or see while in *Bust*, be discreet, ask no questions, the less you speak the better; and whatever shall occur, trust confidently to

my good will and zeal in your service. And now it is time you should repose, the night is far spent, and though the couch of a Dervish may be hard, it is safe ; you may rest on it secure. As for your half poisoned companion, he shall be cared for ; see the drug has resumed its power."

It was indeed so. Caussim had again sunk into the heavy slumber which narcotics produce. The stimulant essence was again applied, and a remedial potion being given him to drink, he was permitted to coil himself up in a corner upon some dried leaves and grass. The bed prepared for Hoosseïn was of the same description, but more plentifully spread, and placed in a recess, or niche apart. The events of the past day kept him awake for a while, but weariness and sleep at length prevailed, and he soon forgot his disappointments and sorrows in repose.

The light of some straggling sunbeams, which found their way through chinks in the wall of his cell, gave intimation to Hoosseïn that the day was well advanced ere he opened his eyes on the succeeding morning : and so sound had been his sleep that it was some time before he could remember where he was, and recall the incidents of the preceding night. At length

he roused himself, and casting a look around, he saw that he was alone in a narrow room, the walls of which were formed of sun-burned bricks exposed to view by the dropping of the rude plaster of clay and chopped straw which once had covered them.

There was nothing in the cell except the dried herbage, which had served for his bed, and it opened into another of much larger dimension, covered with a vaulted roof, still nearly entire, beneath which lay strewed the embers of the fire that had warmed the party on the preceding night. It was a square apartment, having in each of its sides a doorway, giving entrance, as it seemed, to cells like that in which he had slept.

Endeavouring to make his way to the open air, he tried each opening in turn; but when he came to that which, as he believed, led to the portal, he found the passage beyond occupied by a figure seated half naked on a mat, and which, from its perfect stillness and wildness of aspect, might have been taken for an image fashioned out of clay. Beside it lay a short spear; its right arm rested on a short crutch-like stick, placed as a support beneath the armpit, and the fingers held a *Tusbee*, or rosary of beads.

Hoossein, after a moment, recognised it easily as one of the fakeers of the preceding night, and approaching with the salutation of peace, would have passed on; but the figure moving no further from its attitude than just to grasp the spear in its left hand, held it across the entrance, and thus prevented exit.

Hoossein paused, but after a moment or two repeated the attempt to pass; but the fakeer, still maintaining his silence and immobility, continued to resist, but with yet more decided action.

“What?” demanded the young man, “am I then a prisoner?” But no reply was given, and the silence and stillness of the mendicant remained unbroken.

“This will never do!” said Hoossein, with rising impatience. “Where is Allee Neemroo? I must see him, let me pass!” and he attempted to put the man’s weapon aside with his hand while preparing to pass forward.

But the resolute action and fierce demeanour of his guard, as frowning from beneath his matted locks he stuck the spear head in the opposite wall so as to cross the doorway, convinced the young man that to escape without a struggle was impossible; and calling to mind the last words and advice of Allee Neemroo, he judged that this confinement must be not

only with the privity of that friend, but imposed on him for some especial purpose ; and however distressing to his anxious and impatient spirit, he resolved to submit, for a while at least, and wait for what time should bring forth.

He made another appeal to his dumb jailor, in an endeavour to extract from him some information regarding Allee ; but finding it impossible to elicit the slightest sound, or even a sign of consciousness from the ascetic, he abandoned the attempt, and re-entered the vaulted apartment, where, in a corner, he saw his companion Caussim, still locked in sleep. Rousing him with some difficulty, he was glad to find that the effects of the powerful drug he had inhaled had now passed away, leaving only a lassitude behind it, which rendered a temporary confinement by no means a penance to the honest villager.

Occupied with his own busy thoughts, Hoossein paced the confines of his prison with impatient steps, or threw himself at times upon the straw which here and there covered the earthen floor. He could not even relieve himself by discoursing as usual with Caussim, for not only was that worthy personage singularly indisposed to conversation, but there was something in the peculiarity of their present

situation and the mysterious agency of Allee Neemroo, that tended to seal his lips and make him avoid aught that might lead to questions on the subject.

Within about an hour of noon, so far as Hoossein could judge, one of the silent fraternity entered the room, bearing in one hand a vessel formed of a gourd, filled with parched peas, and in the other the shell of a large nut filled with water; and, drawing from a wallet a small bag, in which were crumbs of cheese, he placed the whole before the two comrades, and, without even an invitation to eat, left them again to themselves.

It was poor fare, but hunger rendered it palatable, and both partook of it with relish. It was an incident too to break the monotony of confinement, and thus had its effect in beguiling a little the restless anxiety which was every hour becoming more intolerable to Hoossein. Fain would he have sought to dissipate it in the open air; but without violence there could be no escape; and were violent measures resorted to, who could tell the result? Nay, would not violence be a breach of his pledged word to Allee, and certain to lead to mischief, perhaps irreparable?

The growing darkness proved that the day

was drawing to its close, and with it also did the distress of Hoossein increase ; for when is the human mind so powerfully influenced by the approaching gloom of night, as in times of anxiety and doubt? Who, for instance, that has watched by a bed of sickness, knows not the sinking of the heart which attends the approach of darkness? Hope seems to linger with the lingering light, but darkness spreads its pall alike over both ; and the captive who fondly gazes on the blessed sun as on an only friend, feels his heart sink with its departing beams, as if utterly deserted.

Such were the sensations of Hoossein as night drew on without the occurrence of a single incident to throw the smallest light upon his destiny. A fire had been kindled, and a silent being placed himself beside it ; but not a sound did he utter, not a sign of intelligence did he give. A second frugal meal was tendered and accepted ; and, after the lapse of another hour, the two comrades prepared to pass a second night in this cheerless resting-place, when their hopes were again excited by the addition of another person to the party. It was their guide of the preceding night, who, equipped as then, stood up before them, and, striking the butt of his spear upon the floor, said, “ Hoossein of Ameenabâd ! behold, the

hour has come. Bismillah! rise and follow this servant of Allah!”

“Alhumdulillah!” exclaimed Hoossein, starting up, “willingly shall we follow; but whither? Where is Allee Neemroo? Are we not to see him?”

“Remember the words of him thou callest Allee Neemroo—silence and discretion! Hast thou forgotten? Come on!”

There was neither room nor use for further remonstrance, so Hoossein, having completed their brief preparations, together with his foster brother, followed their guide, and were soon clear of the ruin, proceeding on a track the direction of which, however, the faint starlight did not enable them to distinguish.

The road, though irregular, and leading over heights and hollows, some of which were deep with very precipitous banks, ascended on the whole, gradually at first, and at length more rapidly. They passed by several villages, and through many tracts of orchards, until Hoossein could discover that they were ascending by a ravine leading into a mountainous range, for the high stern points and rounded shoulders of the hills rose on either side, and closed in the view in front. The scale of these heights, and the general character of the scenery, as well as the direction of their progress, convinced the

young man that they had approached and were ascending the magnificent Elwund, and that the recesses of that mountain were destined to afford the sanctuary promised to him by Allee Neemroo.

The hours meanwhile passed on, and midnight must have long gone by, when their guide, with another of the silent crew, who had joined them near the ruin, halted in a hollow, which by that time they had reached. A fire was kindled under the shelter of a rock, and a pipe was produced, which the two fakeers began to smoke with great avidity. It was also offered to Hoossein, who, not approving of its flavour, abandoned it after the first whiff; and Caussim, still mindful of the trick played him by his treacherous friend of the caravan-serai, refused it with a grin and a shudder, being steadily resolved hereafter to refrain from all pipes but such as he should know to be filled with wholesome stuff. Some hands full of parched pease, however, afforded a grateful refreshment, and, washed down with the water of a spring hard by, enabled them, after an hour's rest, to proceed with greater vigour towards their destination.

The path now became more difficult and rough, and their progress consequently more slow, as, crossing several deep hollows by what might be sheep-tracks, they rose, gradually

to a great height. Thus they proceeded, until the first grey light of dawn, spreading gradually over the eastern sky, enabled Hoosseïn to form a better idea of the mountain tract over which they were travelling. But it was not until after crowning a lofty peak, that he could fully comprehend the position they had reached, and the general direction of their route.

As day broke, he saw lying beneath them, to the eastward, part of an extensive plain, the rest being hid by the mountainous range on which they stood, which stretched away northward, in a succession of peaks, and heights, and ridges. It was clear that Hamadân had been left far on the north-east, for no part of it came into view, although numerous villages were to be seen dotting the plain, and nestled in sheltered nooks among the ravines that furrowed the skirts of the mountain. A turn in the path, however, shut out the fair prospect, just as the sun rose gloriously over it, and the guides struck downwards into a rough hollow by a wild and intricate descent.

Having reached the bottom, the party proceeded by its windings for a considerable distance, until rocks and bushes nearly closed in the scene on all sides, when their number was increased by three more fakeers, who seemed to spring, as it were, out of the earth. The whole

then halted, and the guide, producing a handkerchief, approached Hoossein, and intimated by signs, rather than by sounds, that he must submit to be blindfolded, while another of the fakeers proffered the same office to Caussim.

Both at first signified their dislike to the proposed measure; but had Hoossein either meditated determined opposition, or dreaded violence, the power of his guides, to enforce their will or enact their pleasure, was so superior to that of himself and his comrade that the young man, confiding still in the measures of his friend, submitted at once to the proposed restraint; in which example he was followed by the growling Caussim.

Thus deprived of vision, they were led with sufficient care through some very rough places where their guides had more than once occasion to bear them in their arms; and Hoossein thought that he could perceive, even through the folds of his veil, a deeper gloom, and the chill, heavy sensation of a subterraneous atmosphere. But this was of short continuance, and after the space of half an hour the bandage was taken from the eyes of both. On looking around him, the young man found himself in a green hollow, surrounded on all sides by precipices of rock, sprinkled with thorny bushes, above which, in one or two points, appeared the

tops of loftier and more distant peaks, streaked and spotted with snow. But the approach to this hollow was no where to be seen, although the brawling of a brook, fed partly from the melting snow, would of itself have afforded sufficient evidence that some such issue did exist, had his own entrance into it left any room for doubt.

To conceal this entrance into their retreat was unquestionably the object of the fakeers in blindfolding their eyes. His guide, however, left him little time to speculate, for he pushed on without further delay ; and, following him for a hundred paces round a jutting point of rock, he found himself in front of an object which fixed his whole attention.

It was a recess in the wall of rock, so much concealed from view, even by those who might chance to enter the hollow, as not to be observable until approached by the precise path taken by the party, and which led them amongst ruins fallen from above and overgrown with bushes to the front of the place we have mentioned. At the bottom of this recess, the rock, either by nature or by artificial means, had been scarped and smoothed to a height of fifty or sixty feet ; and in the face of the stone thus scarped, there had been hewn out a space like a lofty portal, the sides being supported by double columns, on which rested an architrave of solid rock.

On the smooth face of this architrave, might be seen a tablet inscribed with unknown characters, while on either side, beyond the pillars, was an upright tablet similarly inscribed. Beneath the architrave, appeared the semblance of a gate of stone, filling the whole portal; but the true entrance was a square hole, at the lower part, scarcely six feet high. The remaining space was occupied by sculptured figures of a singular description, and by other tablets and inscriptions, too numerous and intricate to admit of being comprehended at so cursory a glance. Over all, the rock, rough and covered with the natural vegetation, towered to the height of the surrounding walls, so that the portal, huge as it was, was lost, until closely approached, in the general mass.

The space immediately in front of this singular monument was bare, and clear of encumbrances, like a place of constant repair; and marks of fire-places in various corners, near the foot of the rock, testified that its inmates often, if not always, made their fires in the open air. The entrance yawned darkly, like the mouth of a subterraneous abode; and it was not without a shudder of reluctance, if not of apprehension, that Hoossein left behind the fair face of heaven, and followed his guide into a chasm which, to a superstitious mind, might have

appeared more fit for an abode for ghôls and afreets, than a refuge for any child of Adam.

Nor was the scene which greeted him, on entering, well calculated to reassure a failing spirit. When, after a while, the eye had accommodated itself to the comparative obscurity within, the first object it rested on, was a huge, oblong mass of hollow rock, the form of which testified to its having been used as a receptacle for the dead. Masses of stone, either fallen from the roof or fragments of other sepulchral vases, lay scattered here and there; and Hoossein started, as among them he discovered a human form, as stiff and motionless as they, suggesting the idea of a man transformed by magic into stone, the guardian, as it might be, of the dead who slept below. But a straggling ray which entered the place, fell full upon the upturned countenance; and the white glitter of the fixed eyeballs gave token that life still animated the ghostly form.

A thrill of horror ran through the young man's frame, as he gazed yet more intently on the grey, unearthly features, and withered frame, where the starting, rope-like muscles, seemed rigid as the rock beside him, though the blood which had congealed upon the breast in large, black drops, and still oozed from the self-inflicted gashes, issued obviously from human veins.

As Hoossein remained fixed before this hideous spectacle, towards which he had advanced unconsciously several paces, his arm was caught by the guide, who, pointing at the figure with an expressive gesture, led him quickly away ; and Hoossein, who had heard of the acts of mortification and penance performed by these religious ascetics, though he had never witnessed anything of the sort before, comprehended that this was a fakeer or dervish in the act of Tapasiah, or religious abstraction, and penance ; to interrupt him would have been a crime never to be forgiven ; and he therefore at once obeyed the impulse of his guide, and left the saint to himself.

A low, arched opening, in the opposite wall of this apartment, which might comprehend a square of twenty feet, now became visible to Hoossein ; and through this, he followed his guide into a second cavern, which was larger, though more irregularly shaped, and lighted from a fissure near the top, which rose to a height of forty or fifty feet above him. In the walls of solid rock, some fifteen or twenty feet from the floor, were seen several deeply-cut arched niches ; and here, also, the floor was encumbered by numerous fragments of fallen rock.

As the young man entered, he became aware of several other fakeers, seated in contemplative postures, upon skins or patches of straw,

some smoking, and others muttering over their rosaries; but none of them in that frightful state of rigid abstraction, which had shocked him in the ascetic, in the outer chamber.

Pointing to a fresh made bed of grass, on which was thrown a coarse piece of felt, the guide signified to Hoosseïn that he might occupy it, a measure which was rendered sufficiently acceptable by the fatigue of his night's journey; and his comrade having taken up a position beside him, despite of anxiety and curiosity, and all the stirring emotions which his own peculiar circumstances and the events of the last few days were calculated to excite, a few minutes saw both fast asleep.

The gentle pressure of a hand upon his limbs awakened the young man, after some hours of refreshing repose; and on starting up, and looking about him, he saw, seated on their heels beside his couch, the guide and one of his silent comrades, bearing in their hands vessels containing food and drink, which they placed for his accommodation upon a wooden tray. But the repast had this time been provided on a more liberal scale; for a dish of white and well-buttered rice, smoked in the most tempting manner, along with some stewed fruits; while a bowl of buttermilk and water, of delicious coolness, provoked him to allay

his thirst. The gestures and signs of the dervishes were, as he conceived, more courteous than hitherto; but the same silence continued to be observed: and after he, and his companion, had eaten and drunk as much as they required, the fakeers returned to their respective lairs, leaving their guests again to their repose.

The uneasiness of Hoossein was greatly allayed by the event of his night's expedition, disagreeable and even alarming as some of the incidents had been. It was clear to him, that he had now reached the asylum of which Allee Neemroo had spoken; and though the connexion of that friend with the strange fraternity among whom he now found himself, and by whose agency he had been extricated from danger, was still a mystery, he felt, at all events, that he was secure; that Allee had kept his word, and deserved, as on all former occasions, every confidence on his part; a conviction, that was the more consoling, as it inspired him with a stronger hope of attaining the desires of his soul, by the help of his incomprehensible, but powerful friend.

Thus comforted, the day passed away without that painful inquietude of soul, which had so much distressed him during the previous one. He could even speculate with interest upon the remarkable place which had been thus con-

verted from its original use, whatever that had been, into an abode of dervishes, and an asylum for persecuted men. But his knowledge as well as his imagination, were at fault ; and he could only, after the manner of his countrymen, attribute the stupendous fabric to the labours of the Ghiaours, or ancient fire-worshippers, who held sway in Persia, as he knew, in the days of Jemsheed, and Kai-Khosrow and Nousheerwan, and other worthies, before the days of Islam.

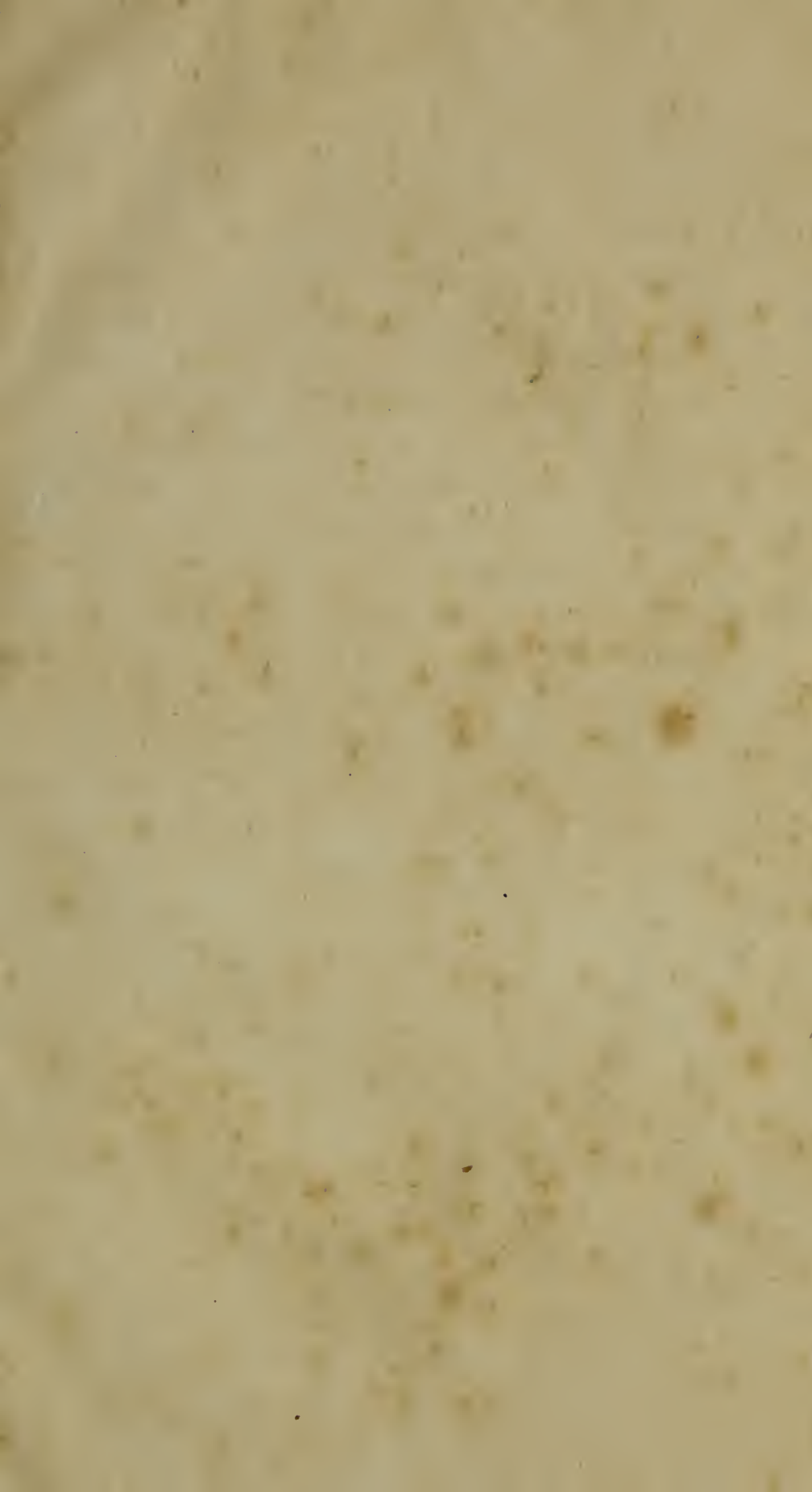
To these speculations, Caussim contributed his full share, relating many legends of similar monuments in other parts of Persia : and thus did the time pass on, without heaviness ; and after another ample evening meal, they once more laid themselves down to enjoy the blessings of security and rest.

END OF VOL. II.

L O N D O N .

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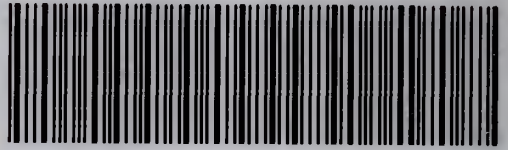
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